

**POLAR BEARS IN THE DESERT: A CASE STUDY OF THE OPERATIONAL AND
STRATEGIC IMPACTS OF THE IRAQ SURGE ON TACTICAL UNITS**

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War Scholars

by

DARRELL E. FAWLEY, III, MAJOR, US ARMY
B.S., United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 2005
M.P.A., Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 2015
M.S.S., Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 2015

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2016

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-06-2016		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From-To) AUG 2015 – JUN 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Polar Bears in the Desert: A Case Study of the Operational and Strategic Impacts of the Iraq Surge on Tactical Units				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Darrell E. Fawley, III, Major				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <p>This paper explores the operational and strategic effects of the 2007 Iraq Surge on tactical units using Task Force 4-31 IN as a case study. By mid-2006, Iraq was moving toward Civil War promoting a change of strategy. President George Bush announced the reimagined strategy in January 2007 sending General David Petraeus to oversee operations in Iraq. By the time Petraeus left Iraq 18 months later, the security situation in Iraq had improved significantly and there was hope for political reconciliation.</p> <p>Task Force 4-31 IN deployed to Iraq for 15 months, splitting their tour evenly between General Petraeus' tour and that of his predecessor General George Casey. Thus, the unit provides a natural study in the differences between the two. This allows for analysis on what effect the new leadership of Petraeus and his corps commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno had on the unit. Task Force 4-31 IN achieved security gains under Petraeus that it had not under Casey despite employing recognized counterinsurgency techniques throughout. This study explores why this was the case and demonstrates the importance of all three levels of war: tactical, operational and strategic in the achievement of meaningful military outcomes.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Counterinsurgency; COIN; David Petraeus; George Casey; Raymond Odierno; Iraq; Surge; OIF					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 136	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Major Darrell E. Fawley, III

Thesis Title: Polar Bears in the Desert: A Case Study of the Operational and Strategic Impacts of the Iraq Surge on Tactical Units

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Mark M. Hull, J.D., Ph.D.

_____, Member
Donald P. Wright, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Steven A. Boylan, M.A.

Accepted this 10th day of June 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

POLAR BEARS IN THE DESERT: A CASE STUDY OF THE OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC IMPACTS OF THE IRAQ SURGE ON TACTICAL UNITS, by Major Darrell E. Fawley III, 136 pages.

This paper explores the operational and strategic effects of the 2007 Iraq Surge on tactical units using Task Force 4-31 IN as a case study. By mid-2006, Iraq was moving toward Civil War promoting a change of strategy. President George Bush announced the reimagined strategy in January 2007 sending General David Petraeus to oversee operations in Iraq. By the time Petraeus left Iraq 18 months later, the security situation in Iraq had improved significantly and there was hope for political reconciliation.

Task Force 4-31 IN deployed to Iraq for 15 months, splitting their tour evenly between General Petraeus' tour and that of his predecessor General George Casey. Thus, the unit provides a natural study in the differences between the two. This allows for analysis on what effect the new leadership of Petraeus and his corps commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno had on the unit. Task Force 4-31 IN achieved security gains under Petraeus that it had not under Casey despite employing recognized counterinsurgency techniques throughout. This study explores why this was the case and demonstrates the importance of all three levels of war: tactical, operational and strategic in the achievement of meaningful military outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first like to thank my wife, Lindsey, for encouraging me to pursue this degree and supporting me throughout the process. Next, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Mark Hull, for his hard work and dedication to help shape this thesis from a raw idea into a finished product of value. Similarly, I want to thank committee members Dr. Donald Wright and Colonel (Retired) Steve Boylan for their time and effort. Their insight into different sources, suggestions for improvement and encouragement have been top notch. I also want to thank Dr. Dean Nowowiejski for believing in me and taking me on as an Art of War Scholar and for his helpful comments to my early drafts. Finally, I want to thank Major Bishane Whitmore, USAF, and Major Dave Kelso, USA, for their feedback as peer reviewers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS	x
TABLES	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
From Incredible Success to Near-Certain Failure.....	2
Toward a New Approach.....	10
The Study.....	13
CHAPTER 2 BEFORE THE SURGE	18
Polar Bears in the Desert	20
Attacking Out of the Gate.....	25
Clear, Hold, Repeat.....	28
Yusufiyah and the Polar Bears at the Transition	33
CHAPTER 3 PETRAEUS TAKES COMMAND.....	41
Translating Strategy into Action.....	43
Fighting for the Surge Brigades.....	51
Creation of Multi-National Division-Center.....	54
CHAPTER 4 TF 4-31 IN UNDER PETRAEUS AND ODIERNO	60
The Final Days in MND-B	60
MND-C Takes Charge	61
The 12 May Attack	64
The Anbar Awakening Moves East	69
Moving West.....	73
At the End	76

CHAPTER 5 TO WHAT EFFECT?: WHAT THE SURGE REALLY DID	82
Tactical Actions	83
National and Local Partnership.....	89
Improved Security.....	93
The Surge from the Top.....	102
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION.....	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

ACRONYMS

BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BUB	Battlefield Update Brief
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CLC	Concerned Local Citizens
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COP	Combat Outpost
FM	Field Manual
FOB	Forward Operating Base
HHC	Headquarters and Headquarters Company
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IP	Iraqi Police
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
JSB	Jurf a Sukhr Bridge
JSS	Joint Security Station
LOC	Line of Communication
LTG	Lieutenant General
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps-Iraq
MND-B	Multi-National Division-Baghdad
MND-C	Multi-National Division-Center
MNF-I	Multi-National Forces-Iraq
MP	Military Police
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom

PB	Patrol Base
SecDef	Secretary of Defense
TF	Task Force
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
VETOP	Veterinary Operation

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. The Yusufiyah Area of Operations 15 September 2006.....	23
Figure 2. Yusufiyah Area of Operations 10 February 2007.....	34
Figure 3. Yusufiyah Area of Operations 1 November 2007	77

TABLES

	Page
Table 1. TF 4-31 IN Stability Operations 17 Sep 06 – 10 Feb 07	35
Table 2. TF 4-31 IN Offensive Operations 17 Sep 06 – 10 Feb 07	36
Table 3. TF 4-31 IN Stability Operations 10 Feb 07 –01 Nov 07	78
Table 4. TF 4-31 IN Offensive Operations 10 Feb 07 –01 Nov 07	79
Table 5. TF 4-31 IN Tactical Actions Comparison	84

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2006, the situation in Iraq looked terrible from any angle that mattered. Security in the major population centers, most importantly the capital of Baghdad, home to nearly a quarter of the population, barely existed. Political reconciliation seemed grim and the economy was not progressing. This forced the administration of President George W. Bush to confront the situation and begin working on a new approach to what many labeled a quagmire or a new Vietnam. With the help of his staff, the military and government outsiders, President Bush decided on a troop increase of five Army brigade combat teams (BCT) and two Marine battalions. Overseeing this new effort would be a new commander, General David H. Petraeus, a man whom many hoped would infuse new life into what appeared to be a failing or stalled war by bringing the principles of the counterinsurgency manual he had sponsored in his previous assignment to the streets of Baghdad and deserts of Iraq. Eighteen months after taking command, Petraeus emerged as a modern folk hero due to the perceived turnaround in Iraq. However, little of this period of time, colloquially known as the “Surge” has been researched and even less is understood concerning Petraeus’ effect on units on the ground. This paper seeks to explore what changed at the tactical level in response to the efforts and leadership of Petraeus by focusing on a single battalion task force, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry (4-31 IN), 2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division (2-10 MTN).

From Incredible Success to Near-Certain Failure

Iraq's degradation to the point that led to the Surge was slow and not inevitable. At one point, Iraq was widely heralded as a success that had validated then-Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Donald Rumsfeld's philosophy of a small, technologically superior land force. In the Spring of 2003, a small-US led coalition stormed into Iraq spearheaded by a dual thrust of US Army and Marine forces replete with M1 Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, helicopters, fighter planes and bombers starting a war known in the West as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). This force, a fraction of that used to evict Iraq from Kuwait in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, was seemingly unstoppable. While a sandstorm was able to temporarily delay the lightning advance of the coalition into Baghdad to topple to government of Iraq President Saddam Hussein, enemy forces were near powerless to stop the rapid thrust of the invasion or to prevent the capture of Baghdad. In 1803, Baghdad's fall into the hands of the coalition may have ended the war. However, 200 years later, in some ways it marked the beginning. In fact, it was the Iraqis' most successful tactic, the employment of irregular *fedayeen* in an effort to disrupt supply lines and divert resources and forces, not the overwhelming opening coalition victory, that proved the greatest harbinger for things to come.¹

Over the next three years, an ad hoc occupation ensued while the Department of Defense and provisional authorities worked to hand over responsibility for the country to an Iraqi government they hoped to stand up. At the same time, a Sunni insurgency

¹ For a detailed look at the military operations that constituted the invasion of portion of Operation Iraqi Freedom see Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003).

aligned with the international, fundamental Islamist terrorist group al Qaeda developed and a radical Shia cleric with ties to Iran, Muqtada al Sadr, stood up a sectarian militia that led to ethnic cleansing efforts among other security and political issues. By the summer of 2006, Iraq was falling apart and on the verge of civil war, if not already there.

The situation had become so dire that the commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) Lieutenant General (LTG) Peter Chiarelli told General George Casey, the commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) that immediately extending the tour of the 172nd Stryker BCT was their last chance to turn the situation around.²

Highlighting how critical Chiarelli saw this action, the extension required soldiers to come back to Iraq who had already returned to their home station of Fort Wainwright, Alaska, with the unit in the process of redeploying at the time. Casey agreed with his subordinate's assessment and requested that Rumsfeld approve the extension; the SecDef acquiesced. This marked a sharp reversal for Casey and Rumsfeld – and their intermediary, US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander General John Abizaid – who all wanted to hasten the transition of responsibility for security in Iraq to indigenous forces.³ It was a stark, if unstated, admission that the US approach was not working and something had to change.

Prior to Chiarelli's plea, Casey's focus was to reduce the footprint of forces. The commanding general wanted troops to be seen less and involved in a more indirect role.

² Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 17. MNC-I was the headquarters that oversaw military operations in Iraq during OIF. MNF-I was the headquarters in charge of all of OIF.

³ Ibid., 20.

Thus, he directed his troops to close small bases and consolidate onto larger Forward Operating Bases (FOB). These FOBs were generally outside of the major population centers.⁴ He wanted Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the form of police and soldiers to take the lead and hold the populated areas. In doing so, Casey had moved troops away from the heart of major urban areas.⁵ This disengaged troops from the populace and created security gaps that the enemy could exploit given that ISF were not prepared to take responsibility for security. Casey may have felt that the US troop presence incited violence but it was clear that Iraqis alone could not take care of their own security in the latter half of 2006.

In a persistent and popular narrative that has emerged, Casey is portrayed as an obtuse, unimaginative commander who refused to acknowledge an insurgency was brewing in Iraq and a man who cared solely about getting troops out of Iraq. Casey was the MNF-I commander during a significant portion of the worst security period in Iraq and thus deserves a fair amount of criticism and blame. Still, he was not a commander without a grasp of the situation. His true faults were that he never adjusted his counterinsurgency (COIN) approach as the nature of the insurgency changed and he did not properly oversee his subordinate commanders; he was not inept. Writers have used the fact that Casey opened his first meeting as commander of MNF-I by asking his staff

⁴ Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 13.

⁵ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008), 106.

who his COIN expert was to demonstrate his incompetence on the subject.⁶ However, Casey was just taking over his staff and likely did not know many of the people in the room. This incident does not prove ignorance. While he may not have been a COIN expert upon arriving, he was neither averse to nor completely ignorant of the practice.

At the beginning of Casey's tenure in July 2004, he stood up a Red Team to study the problems Iraq faced.⁷ The team reported back that they were fighting an insurgency that was stronger than it had been nine months previously and that they needed to strengthen the legitimacy of the Iraqi government through political, economic and security efforts. The following month he approved a campaign plan that listed Security, Governance, Economic Development and Communicating as the four lines of operation.⁸ Over the next year, Casey would come to believe that incoming units did not understand COIN and so he established a counterinsurgency academy in September 2005 and required all arriving commanders—company through brigade—to attend.⁹ He also stood up an institution--known as the Phoenix Academy--to train teams of soldiers, known as military transition teams, who would embed with ISF units and develop them. Most of

⁶ This incident is first reported in David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Brown Publishers, 2009), 161.

⁷ A Red Team is a staff group that attempts to view problems and plans from a different angle than doctrine or conventional wisdom would dictate and ensures that staffs do not get caught in group think.

⁸ George W. Casey, Jr., *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004-February 2007* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2012), Red Team 22, 25; Campaign Plan: 29-31.

⁹ Rick, *The Gamble*, 12.

the instructors at the school were US Army Special Forces soldiers who possess unique expertise in training indigenous forces. He went further, directing a staff study to determine the best practices from 20th century COIN campaigns. Interestingly, the study told him that successful counterinsurgency efforts lasted an average of nine years and that military units concentrating on large bases was a practice employed in failed efforts.¹⁰

Casey understood the problem. His initial security guidance is in line with both so-called “classical” COIN theory and what would come out of Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*:

- Neutralize the insurgency in the Sunni Triangle
- Secure Baghdad
- Block the borders of Iraq to disrupt the flow of support to the insurgency
- Assist in building the ISF
- Sustain support for coalition force efforts in Shia and Kurdish regions.¹¹

However, he and his staff viewed the solution in a different way than Petraeus and his staff later would. The MNF-I commander believed that it was the Iraqis who would ultimately resolve the conflict in their country. To emphasize this, he often referenced the T.E. Lawrence dictum “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”¹² Casey would not be the last to use the advice of an insurgent as a

¹⁰ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, Phoenix Academy: 61, staff study: 44-5.

¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹² T. E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917; Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), Woodward, 4-5 and Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 51. Quote from Lawrence; information relating to Casey’s referencing of quote from Casey and Woodward. Often misquoted, Casey lists the passage as: “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war,

truism for countering insurgents or to give more credence to Lawrence's accomplishments than history may warrant.¹³

Casey clearly demonstrated a desire to put the Iraqis in the lead as soon as possible and it was not just Lawrence that influenced him. Casey's experience as a younger officer in Bosnia informed him greatly. There he perceived that soldiers attempted to do too much which retarded the development of indigenous forces. Prior to arriving in Iraq, Rumsfeld had warned him of just this issue. Casey believed that the longer US troops were in theater, the more they looked like an occupying army. He believed insurgents were exploiting this fact as early as fall of 2004. Additionally, he believed US presence gave the Iraqi government an excuse to delay taking responsibility for the problem. This was, in his opinion, both a product of the "can do" attitude of soldiers and the reluctance of Iraqi politicians to step up.¹⁴ CENTCOM commander Abizaid was similarly informed by his experience in Bosnia. This caused him to believe that continued US troop presence would only exacerbate the situation.¹⁵ While the generals may have both interpreted their experience in Bosnia incorrectly--it is possible US troop presence was what kept the peace--they and their boss Rumsfeld all agreed that that the best path forward was increased ISF responsibilities and decreased US presence.

and you are to help them, not to win it for them." It is possible he was paraphrasing as Woodward claims.

¹³ Several variations of this quote became ubiquitous during OIF and a version appears in FM 3-24.

¹⁴ Casey, *Strategic Reflections* 13, 49, 54, 58.

¹⁵ Woodward, *The War Within*, 5.

Another imperative driving Casey's push to reduce US troop presence was the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546 that authorized occupation until the end of 2005 at which time control of Iraq should have transitioned to the Iraqis.¹⁶ Buoyed by his convictions, Casey continued to direct staff studies on the problem throughout his tenure. He held a review on theater-level strategy every six months to ensure the military was moving in the right direction. Though he does not state it explicitly in his memoir, it appears these studies determined the strategy was correct or only needed minor course corrections.

As 2005 came to a close, the country was clearly not secure nor was it headed in the right direction. After nearly 18 months at the helm, Casey had not realized much of his vision for securing Iraq. One of his subordinate headquarters, Multi-National Security Training Command-Iraq, led at one point by then-LTG Petraeus, came closest to fulfilling one of his goals, which was to assist in building the ISF. He also likely was able to generally maintain coalition support in Kurdish regions. But Baghdad was not secure, the insurgency in the Sunni Triangle was not neutralized, and the borders of Iraq were not secure. Additionally, Shia support for the coalition was tenuous.

Around this time, MNF-I's operational approach shifted toward a policy of less US troops on the street and less troops in Iraq overall under the banner of "Al Qaeda out, Sunni in, ISF in the lead."¹⁷ In addition to his assessment that continued US presence retarded Iraqi growth and inflamed the insurgency, Casey based his decision to make this

¹⁶ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

shift in approach on two other factors. First, the MNF-I commander and his staff determined that by 2006 the Sunni anti-American insurgency was no longer the real problem. Rather, it was a fight for the political and economic control of Iraq between sects, primarily the Sunnis and the Shia. Second, Casey felt that sectarian violence was largely contained in all but four provinces allowing his command to start the process of transitioning control of provinces, which occurred for the first time in June 2006.¹⁸ In the latter case, Casey committed a statistical fallacy in making the assertion: the four provinces with the highest rates of violence contained nearly half of the population. He was thinking in terms of amount of area affected instead of amount of population affected. Casey's decision was not the correct one, but he did not make it due to being obtuse or inept. He and his staff did the work, but ultimately came to the wrong conclusions leading Casey to make incorrect decisions. Then, Casey exercised little direct control over the routine military actions of the disparate units under his command that would implement his decisions. Instead, by his own admission Casey provided guidance to his corps commander and placed his focus on other issues.¹⁹ However, Casey would provide tighter supervision during critical operations.

Casey's approach called for US units to shut down smaller bases and move onto bigger bases. While certainly Casey's conception was that US troops would be replaced with capable ISF who may be less proficient but larger in number, gaps developed. This led to areas with little to no adequate security leading Thomas Ricks to label the lack of

¹⁸ Ibid., 66, 92, 94, 96.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

US units in Baghdad as “Out of Sight, Out of Mind.”²⁰ Regardless of the accuracy of this assessment *per se*, the perception that the US had withdrawn from Baghdad could not have been good for security.

Filling this gap required churning out ISF at a faster rate in larger quantities. Therefore, to implement his “off-ramp” plan, Casey directed the acceleration of the generation and training of Iraqi soldiers and policemen. He understood the risk that came with this acceleration—trading quality for speed and quantity—but saw it as an instance where the strategic value and payoff far outweighed the tactical risk.²¹ Thus, he made turning as much territory over to the ISF as possible his decisive operation. Rumsfeld and Abizaid supported him in this effort.²² However, ultimately reducing US boots on the ground required approval of the president and Casey began an effort along with Abizaid to convince the president that it was time to reduce the number of US BCTs in Iraq.²³

Toward a New Approach

As Iraq became increasingly unstable, Petraeus worked on the problem indirectly. From his position as the commander of the US Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, KS, Petraeus oversaw the development of a new COIN manual for the first

²⁰ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 34. Ricks praises Casey in his book, *Fiasco*, calling him a bright spot in a failing war and giving the MNF-I commander credence for his strategy. Even as Ricks gets into 2005 and the situation is worsening, he spares Casey criticism.

²¹ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 83, 107-8.

²² Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 20.

²³ Woodward, *The War Within*, 4-5.

time in decades.²⁴ In Washington, a slew of academics and retired generals—notable among whom was former Army Vice Chief of Staff General (Retired) Jack Keane, former US Southern Command commander General (Retired) Barry McCaffrey, and Middle East security expert Dr. Elliot Cohen – pushed for a reimagined approach to Iraq. This led US Marine Corps General Peter Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to assemble a group of intellectual senior officers, dubbed the “Council of Colonels”, in order to study Iraq and make recommendations for a way forward.²⁵ One of the potential courses of action that the colonels discussed involved a dramatic troop increase to stabilize the country. Known as “Go Big”, this course of action was also considered by the Iraq Study Group, a bi-partisan congressionally appointed group mandated to take a critical look at Iraq and make recommendations.²⁶ While there was not general agreement on what to do, it was clear that a majority of influential voices agreed that the US needed to change course. Of the different courses of action presented to him, President Bush

²⁴ For a description of these efforts see Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American War of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

²⁵ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 90; Peter Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 41.

²⁶ Mansoor, *Surge*, 53. This course of action only appears as a small inclusion and was not recommended by the entire group. Chuck Robb (D) was the principle proponent. Bob Gates (R) also supported the idea but left the group prior to its final report. The other members of the group were co-chairs Lee Hamilton (D) and James Baker III (R), Democrats Vernon Jordan, Leon Panetta, and William Perry and Republicans Lawrence Eagleburger, Edwin Meese III, Sandra Day O’Connor, and Alan Simpson. Mansoor indicates that the “Council of Colonels” saw the “Go Big” approach as a viable course of action to study even if not all were on board. Woodward claims the council never advocated an increase in troops and was angry they were asked to study it.

settled on a temporary troop increase. Casey, who by summer of 2006 had already served two years and had extended his tour twice, seemed unable to divorce himself from his own strategy and see what others saw. He did not feel extra brigades were necessary and he was supported in this by his corps commander Chiarelli who thought they would not really help.²⁷ Thus any new approach required a new commander and in January 2007 the president announced he would send an additional five Army BCTs and two Marine battalions to Iraq under Petraeus whom he had nominated to replace Casey.

Petraeus took command on 10 February 2007. On the same day, he received a promotion to full general. Two months previously, LTG Raymond Odierno had replaced Chiarelli as the commander of MNC-I. The two new leaders, less war weary and more hopeful, were both committed to an altered approach. During their time in command, these two general officers would oversee a dramatic increase in the security of Iraq by most measurable standards. However, neither would see the national political reconciliation necessary to achieve their ultimate goal of stability. Nevertheless, the increase in US forces and reimagined COIN strategy, colloquially known as the Surge, changed the US perception of OIF.²⁸ Petraeus would receive praise from many, some of whom saw him as a savior of Iraq who came in the hour of desperation and led the campaign toward stability. For his part, Odierno received very little recognition as the

²⁷ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 244.

²⁸ Where the term “Surge” appears in capitalized form it refers to the entirety of Petraeus’ command to include troop increases, new tactics and new approaches. When referring to the increase in US units, this paper will use the lower-cased term “troop surge.”

commander who put the Surge into action.²⁹ Certainly the arrival of additional forces and the implementation of Petraeus' vision correlate strongly to the sharp decrease in violence across Iraq. However, there are few studies that have endeavored to take a closer look to see what actions Petraeus and Odierno took that actually affected tactical units and their areas of responsibility. Understanding the role of the theater-strategic and operational commanders and the true effect of the Surge has deep implications for future wars and for our understanding of strategic command.

The Study

This paper will examine the Surge through the lens of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry (4-31 IN), organized as task force (TF) 4-31 IN or TF Polar Bear. This unit deployed in support of OIF in August 2006 and took control of an area in and around Yusufiyah, southwest of the capital. This area was part of a zone known as the Southern Belt that became a focal point for Petraeus and Odierno during the Surge. Under a blanket policy adopted by SecDef Robert Gates, TF 4-31 IN's tour extended to fifteen months causing them to serve equally as long under Casey and Petraeus. These two factors, length of time under each commander and proximity to Baghdad, allow for a detailed analysis of what Petraeus and Odierno did that actually affected the security situation in Iraq. More specifically, what effect did Petraeus and Odierno have on the tactical units operating among the populace? What did the two truly do to effect change at the lowest level of war where lack of security had a direct impact on the population?

²⁹ This is based on the number of books and articles dedicated to Petraeus compared to the dearth of publications dedicated to Odierno. Within these favorable assessments of Petraeus, Odierno receives mixed credit for his role.

This study begins by looking into task force operations and tactics prior to 10 February 2007. Chapter 2 will describe how the task force commander arrayed and based his forces and how he balanced offensive and stability operations prior to Petraeus taking command. The chapter will also detail how the unit partnered with security forces in their area of operations. This will establish the baseline for considering change during the Surge. Chapter 3 will refocus the discussion on the theater and corps commanders by considering the actions of Petraeus and Odierno and their respective staffs. It will look at major decisions, such as the creation of Multi-National Division-Center (MND-C), and the guidance they offered that affected the security environment and action of TF 4-31 IN. While this chapter will make linkages between these actions and TF 4-31 IN, it will provide broader analysis as it related to the theater where relevant. This chapter will also look at how the commanders communicated to the task force-level and ensured compliance.

Chapter 4 will return to the unit in Yusufiyah to see how it conducted itself following the arrival of Petraeus. It will look at changes to basing and unit arrayal as well as offensive and stability operations. This chapter will analyze the unit in relation to the major actions and initiatives of Petraeus and Odierno. It will also consider changes to partnership to include TF implementation of the Sons of Iraq program. While examining changes to number and scale of operations, the chapter will also look to see if the nature of operations changed. Chapter 5 will use qualitative and quantitative data to reach conclusions on the effects of Odierno and Petraeus at the tactical level. This chapter will examine changes in the security environment from the perspective of civilian casualties and US troop deaths. It will also compare the basing and operations pre-Surge and during

the Surge. This chapter also seeks to demonstrate how operational and theater commanders can affect tactical actions in the hopes they lead toward desired ends. Chapter 6 will serve as the conclusion to this thesis and will examine relevant lessons for commanders. This study concludes with recommendations for further research.

At all times in this paper, the term “strategy” is used to describe the concept of actions, efforts and operations necessary to achieve the theater-level goals of the United States. While these efforts took into account all elements of national power (Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economics) the term is not a reference to national grand strategy. While the Surge may be considered an operational approach, use of the term strategy remains consistent with current writings on this period of OIF. When considering the levels of war, Petraeus is likely an operational commander and Odierno a tactical commander. However, due to the nature of OIF post-April 2003 and its differences from the conventional wars that gave rise to the concept of an operational level of war and the large gulf between the scope of TF 4-31 IN and that of Odierno, it is best to think of Petraeus as a theater-strategic commander and Odierno as an operational commander for the purposes of this study. That is how this paper presents them.

Most currently available accounts of the Surge are the work of journalists or writers who are not degreed historians. They are broad ranging in effort to tell a story or advance a narrative, not to research a particular question. Many of these works were written before enough dust settled to truly analyze the period. Thus their conclusions are based on perception versus careful consideration of data. While most books about the Surge come from journalists, there have been historians who have written on the subject. The first historian to write a theater-level history of the Surge was Kimberley Kagan, the

head of the Institute for the Study of War. Her book *The Surge: A Military History* (written in 2008 and published in 2009) uses press briefings and other contemporary publications from Iraq and attempts to evaluate the Surge just shortly after it ended. The short time frame does not allow her to draw conclusions about the long-term effects of the Surge. Peter Mansoor, the General Raymond E. Mason, Jr. Chair of Military History at The Ohio State University, published *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* in 2011. Mansoor, who was an active duty US Army colonel during the Surge, served on the “Council of Colonels” and as Petraeus’ executive officer for the first year of Petraeus’ command. Mansoor’s book is part-memoir but also draws on a level of sources not previously used. His detailed knowledge of the Surge, his access to Petraeus and his ability to get important documents declassified allowed him to produce a detailed view of the Surge from the theater level. Dale Andrade, whose 2010 book *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* tells the tale of division during the Surge, describes the actions of tactical units but does not link this with analysis of the operational and theater-strategic level.

This era of OIF remains under researched and poorly understood. There is no study that links all of the levels of war together and considers actions from battalion through theater. While this paper uses one task force as its subject, the overall paper is an analysis of the interrelation of the three levels of war. As the reader learns about the approach of TF 4-31 IN before and after the arrival of Petraeus and considers the actions of commanders throughout the chain, he will understand the difference between sending Petraeus and Odierno to lead efforts in Iraq and just sending the new FM 3-24. This paper will show that it was not a new “hearts and minds” campaign or focus on stability tasks

that led to the security increase, but the interrelation of proper COIN tactics, operational decisions by Odierno and Petraeus' vision and leadership that altered the security environment. While the goal of this paper is not to pass judgment of whether or not the Surge was successful, it uses quantitative security measures to assess change. As such, the study serves as a case study in how theater-level leaders can affect tactical units in a decentralized environment where each area of operations presents a unique challenge. Further, Petraeus' actions are informative in that they can provide insight into steps a commanding officer can take in an effort to ensure unity of effort and understanding of his intent.

One major limitation of this paper is the continued classification of documents pertaining to OIF. Unit reports and similar documents as well as TF 4-31 IN's internally written history remain classified and under the control of the US Army Center of Military History. Other sources remain under different levels of classification as well. Therefore, the study makes use of open source documents in the forms of articles, books, interviews and papers as well as relevant documents. This thesis uses many sources not previously considered in past research of the subject to include firsthand accounts of members of TF 4-31 IN. Although I was a member of the TF, I have not used any personal knowledge unsupported by sources. I have also attempted to avoid judging the success of the unit to avoid bias. Where this study evaluates success, it is only with respect to reduced levels of violence. It will be years if not decades before historians will be able to fully analyze the Surge and other periods of OIF and provide the clearest picture of what happened both on the ground and at the highest levels. Given that, this paper is as accurate as the sources available allow it to be.

CHAPTER 2

BEFORE THE SURGE

In June 2006, Bush and Casey stood on the balcony of a US embassy building in Baghdad. Smoking cigars, the commander in Iraq and commander-in-chief discussed winning in Iraq. Casey told him that to win in Iraq would require drawing down. He was taking the long view in that he believed that the longer US troops remained in Iraq the less it prepared Iraqis for the eventual exit.³⁰ Beyond his conviction, Casey felt pressure from multiple sources to get out. The United Nations Security Council Resolution had expired. Abizaid wanted troops out. Rumsfeld had ordered him to study why so many Americans were being killed or wounded, a not so subtle way of implying he needed to reduce American casualties.³¹ Congress and the American people were clearly unhappy. Casey had not convinced Bush that day but kept trying. That same month he briefed the president's war council and inserted a slide in his presentation depicting his timeline for Iraq. This slide showed Iraq transitioned to a "transformed coalition" at the turn of the year.³² Prior to leaving for the meeting, the MNF-I commander had directed his staff to develop a course of action for withdrawing five combat brigades prior to the end of the year and five more by the end of 2007.³³ The goals of the military leadership were not in

³⁰ Woodward, *The War Within*, 3-5.

³¹ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 229.

³² Woodward, *The War Within*, 11.

³³ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 15. Casey does not mention an aggressive withdrawal plan in his memoir.

line with that of the chief executive. The future of US forces in Iraq, like the country as a whole, was uncertain.

Events in Yusufiyah left the future of the area as uncertain as anywhere else. The 1st Battalion, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment (1/502 PIR), an element of the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) had established a permanent presence in certain parts of the city and surrounding area during their deployment that began in the summer of 2005. They found the area to be “a defensive belt akin to a minefield” as they slowly executed a clear and hold approach. 1/502 PIR’s aim was to reduce violence in Baghdad, but it proved tedious and seemingly ineffective. Morale sank and casualties mounted as the unit slowly established checkpoints and patrolled the surrounding areas.³⁴

As 4-31 IN was at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, CA, preparing to replace 1/502 PIR, the area began to devolve into chaos. In March 2006, a group of soldiers decided to leave their outpost and rape a 14-year old girl. The soldiers then murdered the girl and her family and burned the bodies of their victims.³⁵ Insurgent activity picked up in the months following the attack though it is unclear if this was a direct result of the atrocity. A notable engagement occurred in May where 1/502 PIR and insurgent forces clashed near Yusufiyah leading to 25 insurgent deaths and the loss of a US special operations helicopter. The next month, insurgents coordinated an attack against a small observation post near the site of the March rape and killings. The

³⁴ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 427, to include quoted material.

³⁵ Andy Mosher, “At Rape Hearing US Soldiers Describe Stress of War,” *The Washington Post*, 9 August 2006, accessed 10 October 2015, www.washingtonpost.com.

insurgents kidnapped two of the three soldiers at the post, killing the other. All three were members of the platoon whose members had committed the March atrocity. The captured soldiers were tortured to death and had their bodies booby-trapped.³⁶ Iraqi police and soldiers were not ready to take control of the unit's area of operations and conditions on the ground were not favorable to further progress.

Polar Bears in the Desert

TF 4-31 IN, part of the 2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division (2-10 MTN) deployed from its home station of Fort Drum, NY, in the middle of August 2006. After a short stop in Kuwait for administrative and training reasons, the units moved into Iraq toward the end of the month. In their preparation for deployment, the unit identified that it faced an insurgency and made preparations to be prepared for what it would come up against. FM 3-24 was still in final draft coordination but unit leaders and staff officers certainly had enough information about the manual to apply to preparations. Still, the lack of consolidated doctrine required leaders to be creative when developing training. Brigade Commander (COL) Mike Kershaw implemented a COIN-based Officer Professional Development Program. He also developed COIN training events for his officers. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Michael Infanti, TF 4-31 IN's commander, used the Vietnam War study, "A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development in South Vietnam," more colloquially known as a PROVN, as an inspiration for his plan to clear and

³⁶ Dexter Filkins, "Bodies of G.I.'s Show Signs of Torture, Iraqi General Says," *New York Times*, 20 June 2006, accessed 10 October 2015, www.nytimes.com.

hold the area.³⁷ It appears that Kershaw and Infanti both researched COIN extensively and came to common approach for Yusufiyah. How much the writing of FM 3-24 impacted them is unclear, but likely they read many of the same things as those working on the manual.

As the Polar Bears began their relief in place of 1/502 PIR, they occupied established FOBs Yusufiyah and Mahmadiyah, each named after the surrounding city. The battalion also occupied a company base guarding the Jurf a Sukhr Bridge (JSB) that spanned the Euphrates River.³⁸ In addition to this, the battalion controlled a small outpost on the Mullah Fayad highway known as the Alamo. The cities of Yusufiyah and Mahmadiyah served as two apexes to an area known as the “Triangle of Death”, not to be confused with the larger and separate Sunni Triangle.³⁹ The name comes from Shia residents of Baghdad following the US-led invasion who observed that Sunni militants would kill any Shite or Iraqi national guardsmen attempting to pass through. There were even bounties for US servicemembers killed.⁴⁰ Since the area lay between Baghdad and

³⁷ Charles Sasser, *None Left Behind: The 10th Mountain Division and the Triangle of Death* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 18.

³⁸ Sources provide multiple transliterations for the JSB. I have chosen this one due to it appearing to be the most accurate based on pronunciation patterns in Arabic.

³⁹ The third apex lay to the south at either Lutifiyah or Iskandriyah, most likely Iskandriyah. The exact boundaries of the Triangle of Death are not firm but more reporting indicates Iskandriyah over Lutifiyah. Sources are in agreement that Yusufiyah and Mahmadiyah are the two northern apexes.

⁴⁰ Anthony Shadid, “Iraq’s Forbidding ‘Triangle of Death’,” *The Washington Post*, 22 November 2004, accessed 10 October 2015, www.washingtonpost.com. There are more recent accounts that provide different reasons for the names, but Shadid’s account is the earliest English source available and the only one that appears to use a firsthand account to establish the reason.

the Shi'a holy area in Karbala, this was especially troublesome for short-term security and long-term stability. TF 4-31 IN found a battlespace that did not belie its title.

Yusufiyah and its surrounding area extended to the Euphrates River on the western edge of TF 4-31 IN's battle area (see figure 1). The land was mostly flat with several small canals and irrigation ditches extending from the Euphrates River and the Janabi Run Canal that made up the area's northern border. A densely populated area known as Qarghuli Village ran in an elongated manner along the Euphrates.⁴¹ It was an area consisting of a mix of magnificent homes owned by former Ba'athists who financed the insurgent effort and more meager dwellings owned by farmers. Throughout the area there were small hamlets and villages with al-Taraq and Rushdi Mullah being the most prominent.⁴² Yusufiyah proper was largely Shia dominated while the surroundings countryside consisted mostly of Sunni Muslims. The area fell under the jurisdiction of Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B), the division headquarters responsible for the capital and its surrounding area. Yusufiyah served as both a disruption zone and support zone. Enemy forces used the area to move supplies into Baghdad as well as to cache munitions, arms and material for later use.

⁴¹ Qarghuli is alternatively spelled Karghuli in some literature.

⁴² Sasser, *None Left Behind*, 22; Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010), 54-5; David Watters, "Marine Forces Reserve Operational History: Global War on Terror (2004-2007)," US Marine Forces Reserve Website, accessed 15 October 2015, www.marforres.marines.mil.

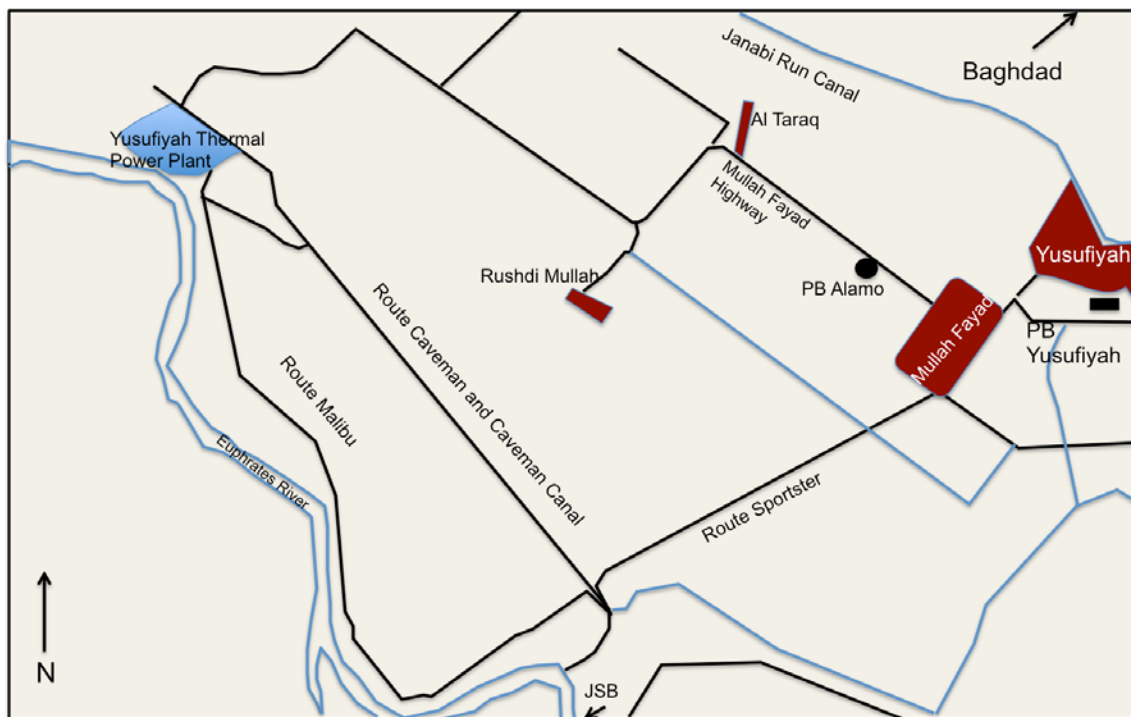


Figure 1. The Yusufiyah Area of Operations 15 September 2006

Source: Created by author. Author referenced Google Earth and Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010).

The task force took control of their sector on 17 September 2006. Kershaw designated the Polar Bears as his main effort. During the ceremony marking the transition from 1/502 PIR to 4-31 IN, Infanti told his troops, “You own it, you defend it, and you . . . establish an Iraqi government.”⁴³ In a letter to his soldiers, Kershaw assigned the brigade three objectives:

⁴³ The Mountaineer Online, “Commando Brigade Takes Lead in Southern Baghdad,” 28 September 2006, accessed 10 October 2015, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer; “History of the US Army’s 31st Infantry Regiment,” Fort Drum website,

- To build and work hand-in-hand with the Iraqi Army and Police forces and to provide security to the Iraqi people.
- To assist the Iraqi government in providing the essential services, governance tools, and economic stability for Iraq to be independent.
- To protect the force.⁴⁴

TF 4-31 IN consisted of three organic rifle companies (Companies A, B and C) and an organic anti-armor/heavy weapons company (Company D). There was also an attached mechanized infantry company that rotated between Company B, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry (B/1-22 IN) from the 4th Infantry Division, Company A, 2nd battalion, 5th Cavalry (A/2-5 CAV) from the 1st Cavalry Division, and Company B, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor (B/2-69 AR) from the 3rd Infantry Division depending on which division headquarters the task force fell under. The task force also had a headquarters company with mortar, scout and medical platoons and a forward support company with maintenance and distribution assets. Infanti organized his Company A as a military training and advising unit parsing out two platoons to other tasks. Companies B, C and D and the attached mechanized infantry company served as battle space owning units each holding responsibility for portions of the task force's area of operations. The battalion partnered with the 4th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division (4/4/6 IA), the "Baghdad Eagles".

accessed 31 October 2015, <http://www.drum.army.mil/2ndBCT/Pages/4-31PolarBearHistory.aspx>.

⁴⁴ Michael Kershaw, "Commander's Comments 3," *The Sandstorm* 1, no. 3.

Attacking Out of the Gate

The battalion launched Operation Polar Blizzard within two weeks of assuming responsibility for Yusufiyah setting the tone for its deployment. Part of the brigade's Operation Commando Hunter, in the early morning hours of 2 October elements of the task force's Companies A, B and C along with partnered IA units assaulted into the farmlands south and west of Yusufiyah. The attack combined airmobile, vehicle-mounted and walking elements to seize control of the towns of Rushdi Mullah and al Taraq along the paved stretch of road known as the Mullah Fayad Highway. During this operation, Company B established a combat outpost in Rushdi Mullah known as Patrol Base (PB) Shanghai. Company C established an outpost in al Taraq designated PB Siberia.⁴⁵ Company B also set up two smaller, permanent outposts known as T148 and T150. These positions served to provide local control of the highway and protect the access road leading to PB Shanghai.⁴⁶ The goal of the operation was to establish a forward presence working toward the Yusufiyah Thermal Power Plant.

The operations was a tactical success extending the battalion further into Yusufiyah than any previous unit had been able to outside of short duration operations. It was the first permanent presence in the area and had doubled the bases controlled by the

⁴⁵ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 55. Throughout the deployment the battalion would name company-size outposts after location the 31st Infantry had been stationed or areas to which it had deployed.

⁴⁶ Philip Sharp, *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire* (Philip Sharp Publisher, 2012), 30-35. These numbers were designated above brigade level and presumably the T stands for Tactical Infrastructure. All positions had the designations with Siberia being designated T147 and Shanghai designated T149.

battalions⁴⁷. This would be the first of several offensive operations the task force would conduct in order to seize and retain more area and then work to stabilize it.

In the weeks following the initial attack, the Polar Bears carried out an aggressive patrolling scheme that kept enemy contact at a minimum and led to a seizure of 130 caches. These caches contained rockets, machine guns, mortar and artillery shells and anti-armor and anti-aircraft guns, among other items. MG William Caldwell, the MNF-I Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Effects and the MNF-I spokesman estimated that the amount of explosives contained in these caches could have made nearly 1000 improvised explosive devices (IED).⁴⁸ This provides a stark indication of how serious the problem of Yusufiyah was. In only a couple of weeks, the battalion seized a substantial amount of material and it would not cripple insurgents. Having been left to conduct themselves without impunity, insurgents could store and move supplies at will through the area prior to October 2006.

In Caldwell's press briefing addressing Commando Hunter, he continuously stresses the role of IA forces. At one point, he states the ISF were supported by coalition forces and uses this as an example of the IA's growing capability.⁴⁹ All other sources on this operation to include Andrade's *Surging South of Baghdad*, Philip Sharp's *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire*, and Jeff Bryan's *Memoirs from Babylon* as well as news

⁴⁷ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 55.

⁴⁸ William Caldwell, "Caldwell Iraq Brief" (press briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, 26 October 2006), accessed 10 October 2015, www.aparcive.com. The number of IEDs in Caldwell estimate is presumably based on a weight to bomb ratio, however, he does not state his methodology.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

reports demonstrate this not to be the case. The vigor with which Caldwell talks about the IA being in the lead either indicates that MNF-I was receiving inaccurate reports from the field or was trying to convince the American people that a drawdown of troops was appropriate. Caldwell claimed that 90 of 112 IA battalions, 30 of 36 IA brigades and 6 of 10 IA divisions had taken the lead in their sectors by that brief on 26 October 2006. This begs many questions about the information MNF-I had and how it perceived the war.

This is not intended to diminish the role of the IA in the operation; 4/4/6 IA lost its battalion commander to an IED during Polar Blizzard.⁵⁰ However, it is important when considering the way Casey framed the problem and made decisions. First, it calls into question what constituted being in the lead and what sort of reporting came to the theater headquarters from the tactical level. If MNF-I viewed Commando Hunter as an Iraqi-led operation all indications are that the US led the operation and provided a preponderance of forces, it may make the claim that all 22 battalions had taken the lead ring hollow. Second, it shows that Casey and his staff may have been looking too optimistically at measures of performance that did not indicate effectiveness. In this instance, it makes it easier to understand why Casey may have continued to believe that a withdrawal was a good idea.

Operation Polar Blizzard was an offensive-heavy operation. The initial attack was followed by a large number of security, counter-cache and reconnaissance patrols. Companies executed some stability tasks such as providing on-the-spot medical care or distributing grain to farmers, but there was only one dedicated stability operation. With

⁵⁰ Jeff Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon: A Combat Chaplain's Life in Iraq's Triangle of Death* (La Vergne, TN: Combat Chaplain Ministries, 2011), 95.

the help of members of the brigade's medical company, soldiers carried out a medical operation (MEDOP) in Rushdi Mullah on 19 October. The brigade's press release does not say how many Iraqis took advantage of the medical services but notes that after a slow start a large number of residents sought care.⁵¹ There were no Iraqi medical personnel who took part in the operation.

Clear, Hold, Repeat

Operation Polar Blizzard and its associated actions lasted until the end of October. The battalion worked to consolidate its gains in the month that followed as units built up their bases and established a better understanding of their new areas. On 25 November, the battalion resumed the offensive beginning an aggressive string of clear and hold operations. Most of these operations focused on moving Company D up Route Malibu, which ran parallel to the Euphrates River. The intent was that Company D would block insurgents from moving men, weapons and equipment east across the river allowing Companies B, C and the mechanized company to control their sectors and build on prior success.⁵² A secondary effect to Company D's push up Route Malibu would be to extend control of a secondary line of communication (LOC) (the Mullah Fayad Highway being the first) to the Yusufiyah Thermal Power Plant. The power plant lay in another battalion's area and would link the two battalions directly. During Operation Commando

⁵¹ Chris McCann, "MND-B Soldiers Extend Helping Hand to Rushdi Mullah Residents," 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division Press Release 0610-50, 27 October 2006, accessed 20 October 2015, comandosof2bct.blogspot.com.

⁵² Doug Livermore, "Economy of Force," in *The Strong Gray Line: War-Time Reflections from the West Point Class of 2004*, ed. Cory Wallace (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 189.

Hunter, elements of 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry (2-14 IN), the sister battalion to 4-31 IN, seized a foothold in the large complex which had been used for torture and was where the bodies of the two kidnapped 1/502 PIR soldiers had been recovered.⁵³

The first operation in this string was Operation Polar Black Diamond, an air assault that established T151 on the southern portion of Route Malibu on 25 November. Exploiting the initiative gained during Black Diamond, the task force rapidly pushed northward with Operation Polar Valor on 7 December to establish Company D's headquarters at PB Inchon in the heart of Qarghuli Village and then cleared areas surrounding the new outposts on 14 December during Operation Polar Vice.⁵⁴ Polar Valor was notable because the Polar Bears and their partners arrived via land (ground convoy), river (riverine boats) and air (helicopters). Within days of Polar Vice, the battalion sent soldiers into a previously unpatrolled hamlet known as Janabi Village to clear insurgents in an operation titled Polar Warrior.⁵⁵ During each of these operations, the battalion continued to demonstrate its commitment to partnership by conducting combined operations. Given the battalion's use of helicopters and, in one case, river boats, it is important to properly consider the magnitude of this commitment. Unlike a

⁵³ Josh White, "Troops Take on Insurgent Safe Haven," *The Washington Post*, 24 October 2006, accessed 20 October 2015, www.washingtonpost.com; Caldwell, "Caldwell Iraq Brief."

⁵⁴ Angela McKenzie, "Polar Bears Storm Iraqi Village by Air, Land, Water," *The Mountaineer Online*, 14 December 2006, accessed 20 October 2015, www.drum.army.mil/news; Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 60.

⁵⁵ Chris McCann, "Polar Bears Conduct Cache-Finding, Detainment Operations," *The Mountaineer Online*, 18 January 2007, accessed 20- October 2015, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

ground convoy or foot patrol where space for soldiers is relatively limitless, dedicated seats on boats and helicopters are normally limited. For a standard four UH-60 Blackhawk air assault, a squad of IA and one interpreter would take nearly one quarter of all seats. The IA gained valuable experience in planning and execution and demonstrated their reach and capabilities to the people and insurgents.

After a month of offensive operations, the battalion stepped back and conducted a veterinary operation (VETOP) in al Taraq on 22 December. During this operation, a single US veterinarian provided care for the farm animals of village residents.⁵⁶ As with the Rushdi Mullah MEDOP, there was no Iraqi face to the operation and this any success was limited. However, there is something to be said about not putting up a façade of the Iraqis being in the lead. Therefore, the lack of an Iraqi co-equal provider is a reflection of the reality that the local government was not prepared to take the lead in governance. It is telling, though, how hard the battalion pushed military partnership without demonstrating the same commitment to governance partnerships. An entire company headquarters with one platoon worked to build the capability of security forces while a single person, the S-5 Civil-Military Operations officer, was the point for governance building. It is unclear from the available sources if this was a result of Casey's policy of putting the Iraqis in the lead, but it seems unlikely. It appears more likely that between Infanti and Kershaw, who dedicated the headquarters and two batteries of his field artillery battalion to partnership

⁵⁶ Chris McCann, "Yusufiyah Animals Benefit from Visit," 22 December 2006, Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, accessed 30 October 2015, www.dvidshub.net.

with the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, there was consensus that building the capacity of the IA was the most important aspect of partnership.

In keeping with this theme, the battalion partnered with their Iraqi brothers to cap a busy month and close out the year on 31 December 2006. Operation Polar Shield saw the task force and its Iraqi partners push into yet another previously unpatrolled area. The mission was search-and-attack the hamlet of al Thobat, four kilometers southwest of Yusufiyah.⁵⁷ Eight days later the task force conducted a combined IA-US air assault near al Taraq during Operation Polar Fire. Polar Fire represents the first time sources report the IA taking detainees independent of their US partners. The two men arrested by the IA were on an IA watch list.⁵⁸ While not monumental, it demonstrated progress.

On 15 January, the task force participated in the largest combined operation in the Yusufiyah area to this point. The Polar Bears along with the 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery (2-15 FA), the unit Kershaw had detailed to serve as the trainers for the brigade's partnered unit, and elements of 82nd Airborne Division combined with partnered units to conduct an operations in Janabi Village. The exact intent of this operation is not clear, but it appears the intent was to detain known terrorists and to demonstrate the capabilities of the IA. In total, more than 600 soldiers from the US and Iraq participated arriving on the battlefield via foot, vehicle and helicopter. During this operation, Iraqi soldiers detained 12 individuals off their black list while the US took an

⁵⁷ 2nd Brigade Public Affairs Office, "Operation Polar Shield Nabs Six Terrorists," 6 January 2007, accessed 30 October 2015, commandosof2bct.blogspot.com.

⁵⁸ 2nd Brigade Public Affairs Office "Battalion Detains Six Suspects in Operation Polar Fire," 18 January 2007, accessed 30 October 2015, commandosof2bct.blogspot.com.

additional 65.⁵⁹ This operation, for which no source lists an official name, demonstrates both progress and limitations. It marked the second straight operations where Iraqi soldiers detained individuals from their blacklist. This shows they were more than mere hangars-on but active participants in the operations. Additionally, flooding the area with a mass of IA soldiers demonstrated to residents who witnessed the operation that the army was sizeable and could reach remote areas. However, the fact that this large operation involved a sizeable US force did nothing to give the impression of an IA that could operate independent of coalition forces. Also, since the large force came and went without establishing a permanent presence, the value of the operation and any boost to the local perception of IA was fleeting.

The task force rounded out the month with one stability and offensive operation each. On 23 January, upon the request of the Yusufiyah water minister the Polar Bears and members of the brigade's special troops battalion drilled holes to test the water quality. Soldiers from the battalion and 4/4/6 IA provided security.⁶⁰ While the US was still in the lead, this stability operation at least had IA partners providing security and came at the request of the local government.

On 30 January, the battalion launched Operation Polar Ice along Route Malibu south of PB Inchon. The dismounted operation involved Companies B and D and 4/4/6

⁵⁹ Christopher McCann, "Iraqi, US Soldiers Clear Village, Find Caches," 15 January 2007, Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, accessed 30 October 2015, www.dvidshub.net; Sharp, *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire*, 83.

⁶⁰ Angela McKenzie, "Yusufiyah Citizens Get Potable Water in their Community," *The Mountaineer Online*, 1 February 2007, accessed 30 October 2015, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

IA searching the areas south of Qarghuli Village surrounding T152, a position between T151 and PB Inchon. According to Staff Sergeant Philip Sharp's journal entry for that day, the IA soldiers conducted all of searches of homes during the operation. If this is the case, it was a step forward even if only incremental. The IA were not in the lead, but they were not just along for the ride.

Yusufiyah and the Polar Bears at the Transition

When the Polar Bears first arrived in Yusufiyah, they occupied four bases. Two (FOB Yusufiyah and the Alamo) were inside the Yusufiyah area. One, the JSB, sat outside of the Yusufiyah (on the west side of the Euphrates) but allowed them to operate inside the southwest portion of the area. Mahmadiyah was to the east of the Yusufiyah and troops would have to convoy to Yusufiyah to conduct operations, therefore the base was useless for controlling the sector. This means the battalion had three bases to control all of the area of operations. In the intervening months, the battalion transition JSB to the IA and moved the preponderance of its forces into Yusufiyah leaving only a small rear element at FOB Mahmadiyah.

By the time Petraeus arrived in theater, the battalion's arrayal of forces and basing had completely changed (see figure 2). The battalion headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) and Company A were located at PB Yusufiyah⁶¹; Company B was in Rushdi Mullah at PB Shanghai and controlled T148 and T150; Company C controlled two positions along the Mullah Fayad Highway renaming the Alamo as PB Siberia (the

⁶¹ The literature stops referring to the base at Yusufiyah as a FOB in the winter of 2006-07.

new company headquarters location) and renaming the old PB Siberia in al Taraq as T147; its Company D operated in Qarghuli Village out of PB Inchon with responsibility for T151 and T152; and its attached mechanized infantry company, A/2-5 CAV at the transition, located at PB Bataan near the JSB with and another position along Route Sporster between PB Yusufiyah and PB Bataan.⁶² Thus, within Yusufiyah, the task force now controlled 11 bases, a net gain of 8 locations.

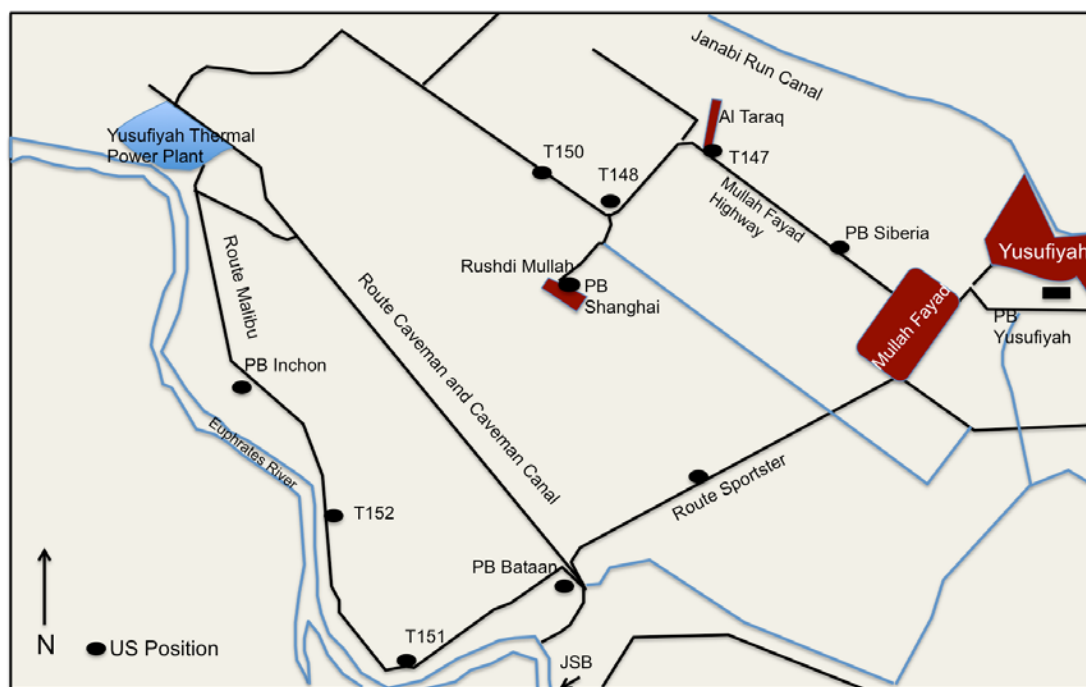


Figure 2. Yusufiyah Area of Operations 10 February 2007

Source: Created by author. Author referenced Google Earth and Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010).

⁶² Outside of PB Bataan were two small outposts (both within site of the gate) that guarded the lines of communication surrounding the patrol base. Though both given numerical designations, for the purposes of evaluating the tactics of the battalion, these should be seen as part of PB Bataan.

From the start of its deployment, the task force conducted three battalion-level stability operations, one in Rushdi Mullah (MEDOP), one in al Taraq (VETOP), and one in Yusufiyah (potable water). (See Table 1 below.) All of these operations featured US forces in the lead. The task force did have a Civil Affairs team and a Civil-Military Officer dedicated to working with the Yusufiyah government. Additionally, companies may have conducted civil engagements on their own. However, as compared to offensive operations, the task force did not dedicate the same effort.

Table 1. TF 4-31 IN Stability Operations 17 Sep 06 – 10 Feb 07				
Date	Type	Partnered?	Iraqi Led?	Requested?
19-Oct-06	Medical	N	N	N
22-Dec-06	Veterinary	N	N	N
23-Jan-07	Water	Y	N	Y

Source: Created by Author.

During this same span, the battalion conducted nine major offensive operations. (see table 2). Each of these major offensive operations was designed to clear an area with three of them also designed to hold terrain. Each operations featured both US and Iraqi forces. January 2007 saw the IA make steady progress taking on larger roles in these operations. After the battalion's first operations, Commando Hunter/Polar Blizzard, *Washington Post* reporter Jason White wrote that US soldiers assessed the IA units they worked with as being "many months" away from having the ability to operate

independently.⁶³ They appeared to still be many months away in early February.

However, the Iraqi soldiers had demonstrated both a willingness to improve and the capacity to get better.

Table 2. TF 4-31 IN Offensive Operations 17 Sep 06 – 10 Feb 07				
Operation	Date(*)	Task	Partnered?	IA Led?
Polar Blizzard	2-Oct-06	Clear and Hold	Y	N
Polar Black Diamond	25-Nov-06	Clear and Hold	Y	N
Polar Valor	7-Dec-06	Clear and Hold	Y	N
Polar Vice	14-Dec-06	Clear Area	Y	N
Polar Warrior	18-Dec-06	Clear Area	Y	N
Polar Shield	31-Dec-06	Clear Area	Y	N
Polar Fire	8-Jan-07	Clear Area	Y	N
Unnamed	15-Jan-07	Clear Area	Y	N
Polar Ice	30-Jan-07	Clear Area	Y	N

*Denotes first day of operation.

Source: Created by Author.

When analyzing this data, a few things stand out. A significant feature of Casey's guidance was the transition to Iraqis. This included reducing the US footprint and presence while increasing the Iraqi's. Far from consolidating on large FOBs, the task force pushed off of FOBs and into outposts dotting the land. Their approach resembled a cross between Ulysses Grant's campaign to open the Mississippi and the garrisoning of the Plains with outposts in the late 1800s. Not only had the unit dramatically increased its

⁶³ Jason White, "Troops Fortify Hold on Plant that Once Housed Insurgents," *The Washington Post*, 25 October 2006, accessed 20 October 2015, www.washingtonpost.com.

bases (a 266 percent increase), but it also led a larger number of battalion operations. While IA soldiers were present on each of these missions and showed progress, no objective observer would classify them as being in the lead. Based on his spokesmen Caldwell's statements in regards to Operation Commando Hunter/Polar Blizzard, it is likely that Casey and his staff did not have a full appreciation for what was going on in TF 4-31 IN's area of operations.

It is also possible that there was a disconnection between Casey's intent and how MNC-I, under the commands of Chiarelli until December 2006 and Odierno thereafter, executed operations. Casey saw himself as a strategic leader, writing, "In the end, I saw it as my headquarters' responsibility to work with the Embassy [sic] and the Iraqi government to deliver political, economic, and communications that would make MNC-I security operations successful and sustainable." This meant that he focused much less on military operations than one might believe. Writing of one of his corps commanders (LTG Vines), Casey states that he "received a backbrief . . . early in [Vines] tenure" and then "with few exceptions, I left day-to-day management of these operations" to the MNC-I commander.⁶⁴ It is hard to determine with certainty what occurred, but is possible that a sympathetic Chiarelli, understanding the problems with the Baghdad belts and distressed over the state of Baghdad only a couple years after stabilizing the city as a division commander, saw an opportunity to make a difference. However, if he did, he did not follow this up with additional actions to support the efforts by 2-10 MTN. Still, it is

⁶⁴ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 159, 64.

unlikely that the MNC-I commander did not have a grasp on the depth of TF 4-31 IN's penetration into the Yusufiyah countryside.

This indicates a lack of unity of effort in Iraq during Casey's final months. Either the MNC-I commander liberally interpreted Casey's intent or deliberately ignored it. The only other explanation was that both senior leaders had little understanding of what actually occurred on the ground. While it is possible that they received overly optimistic assessments from divisions and brigades – it would not be the first conflict in which this was true – it is hard to believe that neither of them could interpret the information to see what was happening. While Casey did not have as robust of a battlefield circulation regimen as Petraeus would, as Chapter 3 will discuss, he did visit tactical units. It is possible that Casey understood that his guidance could not be applied evenly across the theater.

When Odierno replaced Chiarelli in December 2006, Casey briefed him that one of Odierno's key tasks was "repositioning to the periphery of urban areas, following a deliberate process of handing over battlespace to the IA."⁶⁵ Casey envisioned US units consolidating around LOCs, main supply routes and alternate supply routes. While TF 4-31 IN's bases sat on LOCs, they were not ones important for sustainment of the force. Thus, as late as December 2006 Casey reaffirmed his guidance and TF 4-31 IN was not in line with it. Over the next six weeks prior to the arrival of Petraeus, neither Odierno nor MND-B commander MG Joseph Fil took discernible actions to roll back TF 4-31 IN

⁶⁵ "Transitioning Bridging Strategy: Concept and Background Slides (Dec 06)" Briefing Slides, in Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, 337-341 (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 341.

or put them on a path to transition. Odierno would quickly take actions to reverse the course of Casey's direction upon Petraeus' arrival. Therefore, there is clear disconnect between the guidance of the theater commander and the actions of the operational commander.

Another thing that stands out is the balance between efforts to build governance capacity, to build the IA and to conduct offensive operations. The Polar Bears provided assets and resources to all three missions, but provided a much larger focus on the second two. This reflects a belief that security was the most important aspect of stabilizing the area. Infanti told his troops that they needed to build a government and he continued to direct efforts to do this. However, he dedicated a far larger amount of men, material and time to building the IA than to building the local government. The relative security of Yusufiyah proper likely aided this; none of the offensive operations the battalion launched occurred inside the city. Still, the government's capacity remained very small. The 23 January 2007 stability operation that required brigade-level assets to drill holes to check water quality shows how little the government of Yusufiyah could do for itself. Thus, Infanti's focus on offensive operations and partnership are indicative of a security-first approach. In terms of partnership, the unit generally employed effective techniques. However, they could still improve.. Aside from on PB Yusufiyah, units did not live side by side. Also, it appears that subordinate companies did not conduct day-to-day actions with their partners often.

Overall, the battalion seems to have followed guidance from its parent brigade but was not affected by the larger efforts of the division, corps or theater. Casey's guidance to pull forces onto large FOBs and close small outposts certainly had little bearing on

how the task force conducted operations. If Chiarelli's actions informed the battalion, it appears only to be in him not intervening to stop their progress. There is not much evidence available for this study regarding what MND-B, led by MGs Thurman and Fil at different points, did or did not do that would have impacted the unit. Still, the task force was not acting in an uncontrolled manner; they were employing recognized COIN techniques even if what they were doing ran counter to prevailing guidance. While former DoD official Bing West claimed units were doing whatever they wanted, generally conducting large sweeps and mounted patrols without thought to COIN, TF 4-31 IN exhibits the opposite.⁶⁶ It is out of the scope of this study to determine how synchronized tactical units across Iraq were prior to Petraeus' arrival.

While TF 4-31 IN's tactical actions aligned generally with COIN theory and some of the concepts in FM 3-24, published that December, they did not realize statistically significant improvements in security. Military and civilian casualties remained high and the enemy still maintained robust capabilities despite the October seizure of a large number of caches. As late as December the local insurgents pulled off a complex ambush involving a string of IEDs "daisy-chained" that severely damaged several vehicles. Thus, the key to securing the area and creating conditions for long term sustainment lay in something more than just the tactics of the unit on the ground. This is where Petraeus and Odierno come in.

⁶⁶ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, 107. West overlooks actions by brigade commanders H.R. McMasters and Sean MacFarland (both well publicized) and Kershaw in making his assessment.

CHAPTER 3

PETRAEUS TAKES COMMAND

Petraeus arrived a few days ahead of his schedule change of command in order to get settled and get a feel for the situation. Casey informed him that the situation was much better than the US population perceived.⁶⁷ Odierno painted the incoming commander a much different picture. Briefing Petraeus on 8 February, two days prior to the transition, Odierno advocated a “Clear, Hold, Retain” framework with the main focus of efforts being Baghdad and its belts. He encouraged an approach where US soldiers would fight into contested areas and establish bases living side by side with Iraqi partners. Additionally, the MNC-I commander recommended the creation of new division headquarters, Multi-National Division-Center (MND-C), to deal with the unique areas to the south of Baghdad. This new headquarters’ would oversee, among other areas, Yusufiyah.⁶⁸ Odierno’s concepts were not altogether different from anything Petraeus had advocated for or that FM 3-24 established in doctrine aside from the creation of a new headquarters. Multiple sources, to include Ricks and Woodward, indicate close cooperation between the two in the time between Petraeus’ nomination and assumption of command. What is most remarkable is the degree to which the two started off on the same page, something that appears lacking in the final months of Casey’s tenure.

⁶⁷ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 254.

⁶⁸ Raymond Odierno, “MNC-I Inbrief GEN Petraeus,” 8 February 2007, in Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 343-368.

When Petraeus took command on 10 February he did not issue a formal campaign plan, though certainly had an outline between President Bush's guidance in announcing the Surge and his thinking about the problem while at Fort Leavenworth. He did send a letter to his troops addressing his initial guidance. In his letter, he informed troops that security was paramount to the Iraqi government gaining control. He also stated that the US would attack the enemy repeatedly and that US troops would live among their Iraqi counterparts and operate in partnership with them. Petraeus additionally informed troops that they needed to help the government gain time.⁶⁹ This indicates two things about how Petraeus perceived his military forces. First, it shows that he saw the path to better security going through US forces. While he eventually wanted to transition to ISF in the lead, it was not his initial path. Thus he was breaking with Casey's effort to churn out greater quantities of indigenous forces at a faster rate. Second, the guidance demonstrated that Petraeus believed that at this stage in the war the greatest weight of military effort lay in offensive-focused tasks. His guidance omitted mention of stability operations and only indirectly addressed governance building. While this was only an initial signal of intent rather than operational guidance, it is telling.

Petraeus followed his guidance to his troops by telling his generals the following week that reconciliation was a priority. He wanted to take advantage of potential rifts between tribal leaders and agents of instability.⁷⁰ Petraeus also reinforced his initial

⁶⁹ David Petraeus, "Letter to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians of Multi-National Forces-Iraq," 10 February 2007, accessed 5 June 2016, <http://www.hughhewitt.com/general-petraeus-opening-letter-to-the-coalition-forces/>.

⁷⁰ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 257.

guidance by telling the generals that security was paramount.⁷¹ With their feet on the ground, Petraeus' staff, many of whom the general had personally selected, went to work developing a new approach and guidance. Meanwhile, Petraeus, armed with his mandate, had the unenviable task of trying to rally his troops and orient them in a new direction.

Translating Strategy into Action

By the time Petraeus took command, he had spent a significant amount of time considering his operational approach and developing his strategy⁷². However, he faced the daunting mission of translating his strategy and operational approach into action at the tactical level. His situation was not unique among theater leaders throughout history. Alexander the Great failed to convince his troops that pushing forward into East Asia was necessary; thus, he was forced to turn back and return home.⁷³ More modern generals also dealt with this problem. In the first World War, General Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, and General Eric Ludendorff, in charge of German troops, both tried to introduce new strategy on the Western Front in 1917 and neither effectively figured out how to ensure their strategy was “understood, accepted and

⁷¹ Mansoor, *Surge*, 69.

⁷² David Petraeus, “An Interview with David H. Petraeus, General (US Army, Retired),” *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2015-16): 76-7.

⁷³ Bevin Alexander, *How Wars Are Won: The 13 Rules of War from Ancient Greece to the War on Terror* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 261.

obeyed throughout” their forces.⁷⁴ While Petraeus had a smaller force and better communications technology, his task was no less difficult.

The new commander recognized the challenge he faced, mentioning that he could only communicate a handful of ideas and then take measures to get them to stick.⁷⁵ For Petraeus, the real Surge was the flow of new ideas about how to tackle old problems. Reflecting years after the Surge, he claimed the change in approach was much more important than the increase in troops.⁷⁶ Between Petraeus and TF 4-31 IN, stood three commands (MNC-I, MND-B and 2/10 MTN). Reflecting on his leadership of MNF-I in 2016, Petraeus would state that after getting the big ideas right, the next task was “to communicate them effectively throughout the breadth and depth of the organization.”⁷⁷ Thus, it is worth considering what methods Petraeus employed to transmit his guidance down to the units directly operating in the theater in order to understand his role in shaping ideas.

The MNF-I commander used a four-pronged approach to getting his message to the small units and troops. The approach consisted of: daily briefings with follow-ups, battlefield circulation, sending emissaries, and leveraging communications systems.

⁷⁴ Corelli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Cassel and Co, 1963), 252.

⁷⁵ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 130. Ricks does not mention to whom Petraeus was speaking. Though he does not cite his source, he is trustworthy enough to believe that what he reports occurred.

⁷⁶ David Petraeus, foreword to *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* by Peter Mansoor (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), x.

⁷⁷ Petraeus, “Interview.”

Almost immediately, Petraeus transformed the daily battlefield update briefs (BUB) Casey had received into a forum for gathering information and providing direction. He would prod subordinate commanders into actions by asking questions and demanding answers. Questions left unanswered at the conclusion of the meeting would be consolidated by a staffer and sent to the units for response.⁷⁸ In this way, not only could the commander of MNF-I outline his vision but he could also force tactical units to consider his approach. The probing questions and requirement for follow up were an effective means for reaching down to the tactical level while not overextending himself considering he was also dealing with political and economic concerns – along with Ambassador Ryan Crocker – on top of military operations.

Petraeus transformed the BUBs into a mechanism that made subordinate commanders accountable for their actions and provided him awareness of what was happening at the street level. Thus, he was flattening an organization that had many layers between him and those putting his vision into action. There is no evidence that Odierno or any of the division commanders pushed back openly on these or other methods. Petraeus would also hold small group meetings following the update to give specific guidance to his subordinate leaders.⁷⁹

Another method Petraeus used was battlefield circulation whereby he routinely placed himself on the ground with units. In doing this, he got the opportunity to understand how units were putting his vision into action and to reorient them as

⁷⁸ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 91-2. Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 260. Cloud and Jaffe sat in on many of these BUBs.

⁷⁹ Mansoor, *Surge*, 93.

necessary. According to one of his advisors, the MNF-I commander “was consistently out on the ground, observing, encouraging, coaching, and directing, stamping his authority on the force as the new style of operations took hold.”⁸⁰ These visits also gave him the ability to learn what was working and what was not and to push these lessons to other units for them to consider. Petraeus’ schedule apportioned time twice a week to visit units. During these visits, he would meet privately with company commanders to gain their perspective.⁸¹ The MNF-I commander visited TF 4-31 IN in Yusufiyah at least twice- in June and October 2007 – in the seven months the unit fell under his command spending time with leaders and observing operations.⁸² Petraeus viewed his time as a form of communication, thus his dedication to BUBs, meetings and battlefield circulation served to demonstrate what he found to be important.⁸³

Petraeus was not the only member of the MNF-I headquarters to go down to units and ensure they understood and embraced the reimagined approach. The commander sent members of his staff out to help coach and observe units, most notably Dr. David Kilcullen, his senior counterinsurgency advisor. Kilcullen particularly went out with units

⁸⁰ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 136.

⁸¹ Mansoor, *Surge*, 99; Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 93; Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 279.

⁸² Chris McCann, “Top Commander in Iraq Visits Commandos,” *The Mountaineer Online*, 28 June 2007, accessed 12 November 2015, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer; Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, picture insert (October 2007 picture of Petraeus with Infanti, Major Robert Griggs, S-3, and Company D commander John Gilbreath meeting with local leaders in Yusufiyah). It is unclear what messages Petraeus provided to the commanders during these visits or how they interpreted his guidance.

⁸³ Petraeus, “Interview,” 75.

that were in the middle of their tours and/or had served in Iraq in 2006.⁸⁴ He would also visit units that seemed hard pressed in adopting the new approach. By visiting pre-Surge units, the COIN expert sought to aid those who may be resistant to change or may not have the knowledge of FM 3-24 to properly employ Petraeus' guidance. Kilcullen visited the Polar Bears at least once in early June 2007. Kilcullen visited several of 2/10 MTN's positions with Kershaw to include the Yusufiyah Joint Security Station (JSS) where he spent time talking to the unit's leaders.⁸⁵ His assessment was that the unit was on the right track making progress but that they needed to push harder to get the Iraqi systems and institutions in place. His most important message was increased partnership.

The final step in Petraeus' approach to translating his vision to action was his leveraging of communications systems. Petraeus primarily used two forms. The first was e-mail and other published directives. This was his direct form of communication with the troops. The second was his skillful use of media to shape the message. Since ostensibly his media campaign was directed toward the home front, these efforts were his indirect form of communicating with his troops.

Petraeus sent and received hundreds of e-mails every day and utilized this method of communication to get across a number of ideas and concepts. He leveraged this system

⁸⁴ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla*, 135.

⁸⁵ Chris McCann, "Counterinsurgency Expert Advises Soldiers in Iraq," 5 June 2007, accessed 12 November 2015, www.army.mil. A widely published photograph of Kilcullen and Infanti leaning over the hood of a vehicle appears in several sources to include Kaplan's *The Insurgents*, Ricks' *The Gamble*, and an edition of *Military Review*. The photo appears with McCann's article and is likely from this time frame. However, in briefing posted online, Kilcullen uses the photo and labels it from May 2007 citing a specific event it was tied to. McCann's article does not give a specific date for the visit, thus there may have been two visits, one visit in June or one visit in May.

for many reasons but one in particular was that he could reach a large audience over a wide area with minimal effort. One particular concept that Petraeus would convey over e-mail was that company and battalion commanders had both the authority and responsibility to implement his guidance in order to achieve desired results.⁸⁶ Petraeus also sent letters to troops from time to time, such as the one he issued on 10 February 2007, so he could reach his message to the lowest level. In doing so, the MNF-I commander notified direct tactical units and leaders of his priorities and his expectation that they implement his guidance.

Petraeus leveraged media to spread his message and guidance as well. Throughout his time as MNF-I commander, Petraeus granted many interviews. He also worked with his staff to correct facts in the media and challenge what he and his staff felt was irresponsible reporting.⁸⁷ Petraeus' efforts were particularly aimed at the American public and Congress. (Petraeus also hosted 95 Congressional delegations to communicate with Congress.) However, he had to have understood that his own soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines would have read reporting in magazines, newspapers and online. Further, their associates back home, whether family, friends, or, in the case of reservists and guardsmen, clients, employers and employees, would likely read these stories and watch televised interviews and then communicate with the servicemembers. Thus, it was an indirect way of influencing his own people.

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 93.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

David Galula, a French COIN theorist whose writing was influential in the creation of FM 3-24, labeled this “propaganda directed at the counterinsurgent”.⁸⁸ Propaganda though may be the wrong word to describe Petraeus’ efforts, but the idea of messaging soldiers is salient. These efforts represent the totality of ways and means available to a commander attempting to influence behavior and actions at the lowest level. While not discussed here for lack of available sources, this also includes how Petraeus leveraged awards and punishment and how he responded to situations, events and crises.

Save for his use of media, nothing Petraeus did in this regard is entirely different from how a battalion commander might check up on, supervise and communicate with his troops and subordinate commanders. Battalion commanders generally hold daily update briefs, visit troops, send out their sergeants major and operations officers, and communicate through e-mail and memoranda. However, Petraeus made this work at the theater-strategic level which would appear to be more difficult. It is one thing for a battalion commander whose troops number 500 to 1000 and are spread out across 200 square kilometers to employ these methods. It is another for a theater commander whose troops number in the hundreds thousands and are spread throughout a country more than three times the size of New York state.

Petraeus’ efforts to communicate his plan and supervise its implementation appear to be in stark contrast than those of Casey. As shown previously, Casey remained relatively hands off in his supervision of tactical and operational concerns. Outside of

⁸⁸ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 75-99.

major operations, he did not focus on operations at the lowest level. There were a few exceptions. Casey had established the COIN and Phoenix academies to improve implementation of COIN tactics across Iraq and instruction for embedded trainers, taking the time to address every class, something Petraeus would continue. Casey used battlefield circulation as his main form of communicating with the tactical units but does not appear to have committed the same proportion of his time to this endeavor as Petraeus. Nor does he seem to have spent time with company level leaders away from their senior leaders in the same vein as Petraeus. Casey did, however, meet with unit commanders within 30 days of arrival to get a feeling for their plan and provide a forum to answer any questions they may have.⁸⁹ It is unclear if Petraeus or Odierno did this, though it is likely that at least Odierno received confirmation briefs for division commanders.

Casey did not use BUBs as a means of communicating and ensuring adherence to guidance. Nor did he use media as a tool like Petraeus.⁹⁰ Additionally, he relied very little on e-mail as a means of communicating with the force, at least as compared to his successor.⁹¹ While not unlikely, there is no evidence in available sources that Casey sent emissaries out to talk to them about his vision in the way Petraeus did. He did send teams out to assess implementation of COIN, however, these appear to have been survey rather than coaching teams. For the most part the COIN academy was his primary means of

⁸⁹ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 62.

⁹⁰ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 178.

⁹¹ Mansoor, *Surge*, 96.

preaching his vision. While compared to Petraeus, Casey looks less active in this regard, his actions make sense for a commander feeling it was their responsibility to focus on the non-military instruments of national power. Still, Casey saw the path to security through training Iraqi security forces and diplomatic, informational and economic effects. Thus, spending as much time as Petraeus did on tactics would not have made sense. Casey did not see his forces as a pathway to security in the way Petraeus did.

Ultimately Petraeus would never really implement COIN; that was the job of the units. His role, as it pertained to them, was to guide, inspire if possible, compel if necessary. Thus, he took measured steps to ensure tactical units complied with his guidance in a more aggressive and direct manner than Casey. While the ultimate ability to conduct COIN tactics wrested with units like TF 4-31 IN, Petraeus played an important role. His comments regarding his role as commander of the 101st Airborne Division during the early months of the US occupation are quite instructive of how he saw senior leader influence on the tactical fight, “Tone is very important. People say this is a squad leaders’ war. But, what generals can do is set tone.”⁹² Tone was important, but it was not the only actions of Petraeus’ that effected the tactical situation.

Fighting for the Surge Brigades

While it seems in retrospect that the troop surge was preordained once Bush signaled he was sending an additional five BCTs and two Marine battalions to Iraq, the

⁹² Ricks, *Fiasco*, 271.

fate of those additional forces was far from certain.⁹³ From the moment Petraeus took command he had to fight against his immediate commander at CENTCOM, Navy Admiral William “Fox” Fallon, who had taken over for Abizaid. He also had to deal with service chiefs who were concerned about the effects of the troop surge on their forces. The service chiefs were at best not enthusiastic about the troop surge and at worst passively hostile. The service chiefs, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Peter Pace, were at once concerned about giving up units held in strategic reserve and focused on future operations. Many seemed to hope that they could begin to move on from Iraq. Casey, who never wanted to add troops to the US mission, now stood in the way of Petraeus. While the service chiefs could deny anything to Petraeus, as advisors to strategic leaders they were all in position to argue against the employment of the Surge brigades and other resources they deemed necessary for other contingencies. While the actions of these leaders should be understood in the context of the large amount of manpower and budget being consumed with the war, it represented a significant hurdle for Petraeus.⁹⁴

Soon after taking the reins, Petraeus learned that not all the additional units were on their way. In one of his final acts as MNF-I commander, Casey phased the incoming brigades at one per month, but in reality these units had only been allocated. Two were slotted for Iraq, one was intended to go to Kuwait to form a theater reserve and the final

⁹³ The information for this section comes from Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, and Woodward, *The War Within*.

⁹⁴ While OIF had a separate budget that did not come from the services, training, manning and equipping the forces to prepare for OIF did require a portion of the budget while chiefs were looking forward.

two would remain in the United States on stand-by.⁹⁵ Though not quite John Adams appointing federal positions in the final hours before Thomas Jefferson ascended to the presidency, it represented an outgoing leader imposing his paradigm on an incoming commander. Thus, Petraeus had to fight inertia and work with Pace, Fallon and the service chiefs to release the combat power so allocated to him.

The additional combat forces, five BCTs and two Marine battalions, were not the only elements needed to make the Surge work. The Surge also required additional capabilities that these units did not have. For Petraeus to implement his plan, he needed a sizeable number of functional forces such as engineers and military police. Fallon generally resisted Petraeus on many of these additional units. Petraeus finally had to resort to informing Fallon that it was the CENTCOM commander's right to deny the requests, but that it would then become Petraeus' responsibility to communicate to the president and the public that he was not getting the support he needed to carry out his operational approach. Fortunately, new SecDef Robert Gates, who replaced Rumsfeld in late 2006, was a willing ally who could work from Washington to make things happen.

Gates himself was fighting his own battles with the chiefs who continued to prepare for future conflicts while, in his view, neglecting important aspects of the war the nation was in. At one point, Gates had to shut down conversation and tell his chiefs that, despite their opposition, he was approving a sizeable portion of funding to send new IED-resilient vehicles to Iraq. Gates, who had entertained the idea of a troop surge during his time on the Iraq Study Group, intervened and helped Petraeus.

⁹⁵ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 112-3.

The MNF-I commander could have easily backed down or compromised, but it is unlikely that the security gains made throughout his tenure would have taken hold. Chapter 5 will demonstrate how important these additional forces were to TF 4-31 IN and it is likely that they were just as important to other units. Force structure, deployments and dispositions are a strategic undertaking, but due to Petraeus' persistence and Gates' intervention, this strategic action affected tactical operations. Fighting for the force was not enough, though. Placing them and employing them effectively were just as important. In this way, the creation of MND-C and the assigning of Surge forces to the new division, affected TF 4-31 IN just as much.

Creation of Multi-National Division-Center

As noted earlier in this study, when the Polar Bears arrived in Iraq, they were one of a number of units under the control of Multi-National Division-Baghdad first run by MG J. D. Thurman, commander of the 4th Infantry Division, and then MG Joseph Fil, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division. At the time, Baghdad was one of the four districts that Casey described as being the most violent in Iraq. While many seemed to acknowledge that the areas around Baghdad facilitated the violence by moving what Odierno termed accelerants (weapons, explosives and terrorists) into the capital, focus remained on the city under Casey.⁹⁶ The fight in the rural belts was different in nature than that in Baghdad proper. The capital was too different and too large of a problem for TF 4-31 IN and other units of 2/10 MTN to receive the command attention and assets necessary to successfully accomplish the mission. While the decision to create MND-C

⁹⁶ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 25.

was Petraeus' with Odierno being the impetus, it should be noted that 2/10 MTN commander Kershaw informed Odierno that without a separate division, the belts would always be a secondary front and that a new division would create unity of effort across the southern belt.⁹⁷

Odierno's staff identified the Baghdad belts as a major issue. Sunni insurgents, Shia militias and al Qaeda operatives all exploited these areas north and south of the capital. The MNC-I analysis pinned the areas as locations where insurgents and terrorists built bombs and from which they smuggled the bombs into Baghdad. Additionally, supply routes and support zones intersected in these areas, leading MNC-I to label them "friction" points. Of the outlying areas, the two most violent were Baqubah and Yusufiyah. These two areas remained hotbeds for insurgent activity and were natural locations for anti-government fighters to flee once Surge operations commenced in Baghdad. It became clear that the unique problem of the belts required a force dedicated to these areas to block escape routes and disrupt the flow of insurgents, weapons and equipment. The belts had to be removed as a veritable sanctuary for the Surge to work.⁹⁸

Baghdad and its outskirts were interconnected but distinct problems that needed separate commands to effectively handle them. Realizing this, but also understanding Casey's hesitance to increase US presence and security responsibility, Odierno waited until Petraeus took command to recommend breaking the southern belt off into a new division. This command would come to be known as Multi-National Division-Center and

⁹⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁸ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 258; Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 17.

the 3rd Infantry Division, under MG Rick Lynch, would assume headquarters responsibility when it arrived in March. Like some of the other important things that Petraeus would do, such as embracing the Anbar Awakening, it was not his idea but his subordinate leadership that got it done.

The creation of MND-C provided several advantages to TF 4-31 IN and 2/10 MTN. The primary benefit relates to the previous section. MND-C inherited 2/10 MTN and the 4th BCT (Airborne) of the 25 Infantry Division but would comprise two more brigades that came as part of the troop surge. The area had seen significantly less attention than the city over the previous years. The 1/502 PIR had laid the foundation for a permanent presence in the area and TF 4-31 IN took full advantage. However, on the eve of Petraeus' arrival, much of the space around 2/10 MTN remained lawless, uncontrolled frontier. Without units to shore up its borders, TF 4-31 IN could never truly secure greater Yusufiyah or prevent the area from being used to attack Baghdad.

The task force would not receive any additional combat forces under its control and it does not appear that 2/10 MTN did either. Nor did the Polar Bears relinquish any of their battle space to other units. However, the new units made TF 4-31 IN's area less the virtual island it had been. While a true island is an ideal situation for a counterinsurgent, it only works if the counterinsurgent can prevent enemy personnel and material from moving on or off the island.⁹⁹ TF 4-31 IN could not do this without the additional brigades guarding the seams and preventing gaps. The task force and its sister 2/10 MTN battalions had made significant progress in terms of establishing presence,

⁹⁹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 24-5.

disrupting the enemy and employing COIN tactics, yet the area remained volatile and hostile and would stay this way until May when MND-C had control of the entire combat aviation brigade and the two heavy BCTs. By June, when the last Surge units arrived to MND-C, the Polar Bears could direct energy on a more but not wholly finite number of enemy fighters making it easier to target efforts and direct operations. There is a significant correlation between the complete establishment of MND-C and the drop in violence in TF 4-31 IN's area of operations, which will be discussed further in chapters 4 and 5.

The new division headquarters would also have its own portion of key assets and enablers such as Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, chief of which were unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and aviation assets both in the form of surveillance and attack.¹⁰⁰ The new division headquarters received an entire combat aviation brigade.¹⁰¹ This brigade provided the command 78 helicopters capable of surveillance and aerial attack and 62 helicopters capable transporting men and equipment. MND-C also received four UAVs.¹⁰² This represented a significant increase in attack,

¹⁰⁰ With the publishing of Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (16 May 2012) the Army replaced the term ISR with "information collection." ISR is used here to remain consistent with literature and the doctrine of the time.

¹⁰¹ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 23.

¹⁰² Ibid., 93. The combat aviation brigade was the 3rd Infantry Division with attached assets from the 10th Mountain Division's combat aviation brigade. In total, there were 48 AH-64D Apache attack helicopters (attack and surveillance) 50 UH-60 Blackhawk utility helicopters (lift assets), 12 CH-47 Chinook cargo helicopters (lift assets), 30 OH-58D Kiowa Warrior observation helicopters (attack and surveillance) and four RQ-7 Shadow UAVs (surveillance). The OH-58Ds were from the 10th Mountain Division.

reconnaissance and lift assets available to TF 4-31 IN. Most important were the increased lift assets given the unit's propensity to conduct air assault operations and the need to quickly evacuate casualties in an area an hour's drive by combat vehicle to the nearest combat hospital.

The new headquarters also received functional units such as psychological operations, explosive ordnance disposal and engineering assets that would enable TF 4-31 IN to enhance their operations. However, MND-C would not have everything it and its subordinate units needed; some assets and functional units would remain under the control of MNC-I to be apportioned as necessary. Now under a command focused primarily on the problem set of the southern belt provided the Polar Bears with a headquarters that could fight with equal voice at a table with other units. It would no longer be a secondary effort to Baghdad's primary focus. MND-C could allocate assets to Yusufiyah in way MND-B never could. The benefits of these additional assets are somewhat tangential to the main argument in this thesis in that they did not directly change the way TF 4-31 IN operated. However, the benefits can be seen when considering the unit's operations moving forward. Chapter 4 will discuss this further.

The major action Petraeus took was supporting the Anbar Awakening and working to spread it across Iraq. Chapter 4 will provide further details into this action. In sum, these efforts represent major actions that would come to effect TF 4-31 IN and change the security situation in the area. After describing the final seven months of the Polar Bears' deployment in the next chapter, Chapter 5 will analyze the actions of Petraeus and Odierno with respect to what occurred in Yusufiyah. While this chapter discusses Petraeus' efforts to create unity of effort in COIN across Iraq, it does not

discuss any intervention by him or Odierno to change the approach of TF 4-31 IN. While the MNF-I commander and his advisor Kilcullen did go to Yusufiyah, the next chapter will demonstrate that the Polar Bears did not alter their tactics. This is important to consider when thinking about what truly made a difference in Iraq.

CHAPTER 4

TF 4-31 IN UNDER PETRAEUS AND ODIERNO

The arrival of the Surge-its units, its ideas and its commander-did not alter the boundaries for which TF 4-31 IN was responsible. The change to MND-C would eventually replace the attached mechanized infantry company from 1st Cavalry Divisions' A/2-5 CAV to 3rd Infantry Division's B/2-69 AR. But, to an infantryman on the ground, the change was transparent. However, there were certain differences in how the unit operated after Petraeus arrived. This chapter will explore those changes taking a similar chronological approach as chapter 2.

The Final Days in MND-B

On 10 February 2007, the 3rd Infantry Division's headquarters was still at the unit's home station, Fort Stewart, GA, reworking deployment plans with an accelerated timeline and new area of operations. It would be a two months before MND-C would become initially operational and another month before it was fully operational. Therefore initially TF 4-31 IN remained under MND-B. It would also be several weeks before Petraeus and Odierno would issue guidance beyond the initial 10 February letter. Thus, the only signal from the top had informed the Polar Bears that they were on track and thus the continued operations as it had with similar results: physical gains and tactical victories but not clearly on track for tangible and sustainable security gains.

On 12 February, the unit conducted Operation Polar Dagger with Companies B and C vicinity Jasim Road. The operation was a cordon and search of the area near

Rushdi Mullah. It is unclear if there were members of 4/4/6 IA involved.¹⁰³ From 16 to 17 February, members of the battalion, including attached A/2-5 CAV soldiers, partnered with the IA in an unnamed operation combining air and ground vehicle delivered elements to cordon and search parts of Qarghuli Village. The operation resulted in 48 detainees, one of whom was reportedly a member of al Qaeda in Iraq and another a known Sunni extremist.¹⁰⁴ Operation Polar Thunder, a company-level air assault to capture a leader of one of the insurgent cells near Rushdi Mullah, rounded out the month on 23 February.¹⁰⁵ There is no information that the battalion conducted any offensive or stability operations in the month of March.

MND-C Takes Charge

At the beginning of April, TF 4-31 IN came under the purview of the newly created MND-C. Their first major action under the new command was a partnered stability operation with the Iraqi's nominally in the lead. The battalion had stockpiled 100 tons of fertilizer the previous month and contracted for a truck and workers to distribute the fertilizer to the first tribe in mid-April. Iraqi soldiers took the lead in securing the workers and interfacing with the tribesmen.¹⁰⁶ The operation was very small in scale but

¹⁰³ Sharp, *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire*, 105.

¹⁰⁴ First Cavalry Division Public Affairs Office, "Polar Bears detain AIF leader and 47 others during mission," *The Daily Charge*, 19 February 2007, accessed 10 February 2016, http://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf_1856.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Sharp, *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire*, 113-4.

¹⁰⁶ Joe Caron, "Baghdad Eagles, Polar Bears Distribute Fertilizer to Farmers," *The Mountaineer Online*, 19 April 2007, accessed 12 February 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer. The article states that this action occurred 20 April but the article was

represented something different from previous operations. Even though the US forces had done the work to secure and move fertilizer, what the residents saw was the Iraqi government providing them with a service

The task force continued offensive operations with Operation Polar Deliverance on 21 April. Companies B and D air assaulted to the west bank of the Euphrates opposite Qarghuli Village. The three-day operation was designed to investigate intelligence reports about insurgent activity on that side of the river.¹⁰⁷ Sources report on that on the same day members of the task force and 4/4/6 IA conducted Operation Polar Dive.¹⁰⁸ It is unclear if these are the same or separate operations. Taken as one, it represents the continued efforts of the task force to secure their area of operations. The same month, the task force participated in Operation Commando Auger where Company C established and occupied Combat Outpost (COP) Corregidor north of the original Polar Bear boundaries. Company C would turn this COP over to 2/10 MTN's reconnaissance squadron, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry, two months later.¹⁰⁹

published in the 19 August issue of *The Mountaineer*, Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division's weekly newspaper.

¹⁰⁷ Sharp, *Not in the Win, Earthquake, or Fire*, 144.

¹⁰⁸ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 60; 2nd Brigade Public Affairs Office, "Operation Commando Dive leads to detentions, cache finds," *The Mountaineer Online*, 26 April 2007, accessed 12 February 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

On 1 May, the battalion kicked off Operation Polar Scrum with their partners, detaining 85 suspects during the two day mission.¹¹⁰ There is no information of how many of these detained suspects moved forward in the justice system and how many returned to their homes. Thus, the battalion continued to emphasize offensive operations at the task force level as the primary focus with stability operations a secondary efforts. Hand in hand was the battalion's partnership with and training of 4/4/6 IA. Stability operations largely were the responsibility of the S5 civil-military operations officer, the Civil Affairs team and the companies. Though TF 4-31 IN had transferred to MND-C, it seemed to remain aware of its role in disrupting the flow of anti-government/sectarian fighters, weapons and equipment into Baghdad. Writ large, this, along with securing greater Yusufiyah and building the capacity of the IA, was where the battalion placed its greatest effort.

On 8 May, the partnership efforts paid off as 4/4/6 IA took the lead in Yusufiyah proper assuming responsibility for security. The ceremony was quite elaborate including mock battles between IA and insurgents.¹¹¹ While sources do not provide a complete picture, the evidence suggests that the IA had a large responsibility for the town of Yusufiyah for quite some time. None of the battalion's major offensive operations targeted the district seat. So, while a good news story, the battalion's focus does not

¹¹⁰ 2nd Brigade Public Affairs Office, "Operation Polar Scrum Helps Get Suspected Terrorists, IEDs off the Street," 6 May 2007, accessed 12 February 2016, <http://commandosof2bct.blogspot.com/2007/05/operation-polar-scrum-helps-get.html>.

¹¹¹ Chris McCann, "Baghdad Eagle Battalion Takes the Lead in Counterinsurgency Fight," *The Mountaineer Online*, 17 May 2007, accessed 12 February 2007, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

appear to have changed much. Still, it is possible the battalion could free up assets and resources for operations elsewhere. The transfer of authority demonstrated the value of having a company headquarters dedicated to training and advising, however, the S5 and Civil Affairs team are unsung heroes in this. They focused much of their efforts on the town despite being a secondary line of effort providing Yusufiyah the governance support necessary once security was established. In the areas surrounding Yusufiyah, US soldiers remained firmly in the lead conducting some unilateral patrols while the battalion staff continued planning operations. Thus the ceremony brought no retrenchment of US forces in the area not was their indication this was planned in the near term.

The 12 May Attack

On 12 May a catastrophic event occurred that rocked the unit. Insurgents attacked two vehicles from Company D's 1st platoon sitting in a static position overwatching an IED crater on Route Malibu south of PB Inchon. The soldiers were hoping to prevent the enemy from reseeded the hole with additional explosives. Four US soldiers and an IA partner who had learned English well enough to also translate for the patrol died in the attack. Three US soldiers were declared Duty Status-Whereabouts Unknown (DUSTWUN)-a preliminary status to missing in action-and later were later determined to have been captured. An al Qaeda affiliate calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility.¹¹²

¹¹² Angela McKinzie, "US, Iraqi troops search for comrades," *The Mountaineer* 17 May 2007, accessed 15 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

In the following days, Iraqi Policemen found the body of one soldier floating in the Euphrates but the others remained missing throughout the rest of the unit's tour. If there ever was an indication that the task force still faced considerable security challenges it was this. The resources, personnel and training to pull off an attack like this were extensive. For all their hard work living amongst the populace, clearing areas and building the capacity of the IA, Yusufiyah remained a dangerous place where the enemy felt secure enough to pull off a complex, well-rehearsed and well planned attack.

TF 4-31 IN took several steps in response the event. While not all appear to be actions in accordance with COIN doctrine, none were retaliatory, and all appeared relatively in line with the unit's methodology. The first response was Operation Polar Charade kicked off within hours of the incident intended to scour the greater Yusufiyah for the missing soldiers.¹¹³ 2/10 MTN brigade commander Colonel Kershaw enhanced these efforts by initiating Operation Commando Razor, which cast a wider net around Yusufiyah. In total, the operation consisted of 12 air assaults in the three days following the operation. TF 4-31 IN's patrols detained every male they determined to be of military age and moved them to PB Inchon for questioning and disposition. The battalion detained more than 500 men in the days following the attack. Members of the battalion's reconnaissance platoon destroyed bridges across the Caveman Canal, which ran north to south through the middle of the battalion's sector. In total, more than 4000 US and Iraqi soldiers participated in the efforts to find the missing men.¹¹⁴ All of this had the

¹¹³ Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon*, 177.

¹¹⁴ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 93; Livermore, "Economy of Force," 194; McKinzie, "US, Iraqi troops search for comrades."

immediate tactical effect of placing pressure on militants in the area and the destruction of the bridges across the canal forced traffic through task force checkpoints. However, given that Yusufiyah was mostly farmland, taking 500 men from the countryside for several days certainly had negative economic consequences.

A positive effect of the attack for the coalition was the galvanizing of the relationship between US and Iraqi soldiers. Another was the ability of the IA to demonstrate their competence, capabilities and willingness to act while taking part in the large clearance operations. Reportedly, the Iraqi soldiers from 4/4/6 IA were instrumental in the operations that followed the 12 May attack.¹¹⁵ While the Islamic State of Iraq had executed their attack on the coalition forces well, they had not accounted for the potential of the patrol having an IA soldier. Therefore, their attack caused Iraqi and US soldiers to die together and certainly gave the two units a reason to coalesce. It would represent, then, a short term tactical victory for the insurgents that ultimately had negative effects on the Yusufiyah area of operations.¹¹⁶

In the month following the attack and kidnapping, MND-C flooded the area in and around greater Yusufiyah with 66 company-sized operations in conjunction with the IA and flew 350 hours of UAV missions.¹¹⁷ Security improved in the weeks following the attack, though it would be hard to tell at the time if that were due to the mini-surge of

¹¹⁵ McKinzie, “US, Iraqi troops search for comrades.”

¹¹⁶ One could argue that the larger strategic value of the kidnapping in terms of the psychological and information effects on the American people outweighed what happened in Yusufiyah. However, that is out of the scope of this work.

¹¹⁷ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 96.

forces and mass detentions or if it were harbinger of things to come. However, by the end of May the Surge effects of the creation of MND-C were nearly all in place. Whereas the borders beyond 2/10 MTN had been relatively open allowing insurgents to move with impunity in many parts, there were now US brigades in all directions. This helped to close a large portion of the seams and gaps that had existed. Without these brigades, the large sweeping operations, which were designed as searches but ended up pushing enemy fighters out of certain areas, would have only forced insurgents into ungoverned territory. With the two additional BCTs in the southern belt the enemy had to move into a new area of operation or go into hiding. Baghdad also became less of an appealing option with a much larger presence on the streets by this time. Greater Yusufiyah was far from secure, but the area was beginning to see positive effects from the Surge. It helps explain why a unit heretofore executing proper COIN tactics had seen little payoff but now could see some positive results.

As for the battalion, emotions ran deep. Twice Kershaw, who spent a good deal of time in the task force area of operations following the attacks, intimated that morale was low among soldiers who would end up going home without finding their two remaining missing comrades.¹¹⁸ This seemed more like a recipe for disengagement or worse.

Kershaw understood the potential for soldiers to abandon their discipline, writing to troops in the brigade's internal magazine, "At this time it would be easy and natural to forget our moral position – to return hate for the hate we have seen in the loss of our comrades. However, we must not forget our moral high ground, the fact that our country

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 95, 98.

is founded on freedom and laws which protect us from torture, from groundless arrests and searches.”¹¹⁹ (Kershaw must have approved the initial detentions in Qarghuli Village, thus he probably was referring to future acts.) How many soldiers read these words is impossible to know. Still, through leadership and discipline and maybe good luck, not a single soldier was accused of any crime or atrocity.

The battalion’s actions defied what one may expect. As the rest of this chapter will show, the Polar Bears increased their commitment to sound COIN tactics that had placed them in position to lose seven comrades (five dead and two missing). In the weeks following the insurgent attack, the battalion held two MEDOPs, one more than they had under Casey. One of these operators featured an Iraqi medic working alongside the battalion’s medics.¹²⁰ In late June, the task force participated in a brigade operation, Commando Eagle, a large-scale operation designed to disrupt insurgent activity throughout the belt.¹²¹

Soon, though, TF 4-31 IN would embrace a movement that would prove even more disruptive to insurgents in Yusufiyah than any action taken heretofore. They would help stand up a local version of the Sons of Iraq movement, putting guns in the hands of locals who at best passively allowed insurgents to attack them and at worst may have

¹¹⁹ Michael Kershaw, “Commander’s Comments,” in *Sandstorm*, Issue 11.

¹²⁰ Joe Caron, “Polar Bears lend helping hand to Iraqis,” *The Mountaineer* (21 June 2007), accessed 18 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer; Chris McCann, “Troops aid local residents, build friendships,” 26 June 2007, accessed 18 April 2016, commandosof2bct.blogspot.com.

¹²¹ 2nd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office, “Commando Eagle starts of strong,” 25 June 2007, accessed 18 April 2016, commandosof2bct.blogspot.com.

been insurgents themselves. This demonstrates a high level of trust in the locals that one would not expect to find in unit that detained 500 Qarghuli tribesman. The next section will explore this deeper.

The Anbar Awakening Moves East

In the summer of 2006 in Ramadi, Iraq, an enterprising US Army captain named Travis Patriquin, a former Special Forces noncommissioned officer who had immersed himself in Arabic and Iraqi culture, met with Sattar Abu Risha, the sheikh of a small tribe, at the latter's compound. Some intelligence officials saw Sattar as a mob-leader. But, he was growing fed up with al Qaeda and Patriquin saw the potential to leverage Sattar and his men in the fight against Sunni insurgents and terrorists. The meeting proved fruitful. Though many had hoped Sattar could provide intelligence, he instead offered his services as the leader of a militia or similar group. Patriquin, who advised 1st BCT, 1st Armored Division's commander Colonel Sean MacFarland, agreed to talk to his superiors about it.¹²² The movement that grew from this meeting-fostered by MacFarland-came to be known as the Anbar Awakening. Fed-up tribal leaders turned against Sunni extremists in the province and backed the Americans and legitimate Iraqi forces.

The Anbar Awakening became a bright, if tenuous, spot in a war that seemed to many as hopeless, dire, or both. But, while Casey acknowledged in his memoir being

¹²² William Doyle, *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq* (New York: New American Library, 2011), 3-16.

happy with this development, he took no discernible steps to expand it.¹²³ For the rest of Casey's tenure this American success story was contained to MacFarland's brigade in the western desert beyond the Euphrates.

Some have contested that the Anbar Awakening was an anomalous event that cannot be counted as a result of the Surge. This is true. Patriquin and Sattar had their meeting nearly seven months before Petraeus took command of MNF-I and well before the final version of FM 3-24 rolled off the printing press. Neither man would be alive of when TF 4-31 IN returned to Fort Drum in November 2007. However, while the Surge did not create the Anbar Awakening, it spread the movement to other parts of Iraq.

The Surge was not just a temporary increase in forces but also a change in strategy, a willingness to accept new risks when testing new ideas and a conversion to a fresh commander. Petraeus jumped on the development of the Awakening and rushed to expand it where Casey had not. Within days of taking command, Petraeus traveled to Ramadi to assess the Awakening. He quickly embraced the movement and encouraged other units to seek to stand up similar groups if the situation allowed for it. Petraeus resolved to support these movements using resources available to him and eventually get the Iraqi government to support the movement.¹²⁴ Across Iraq, the local security guards became known as the Sons of Iraq. In June 2007, nearly a year after Patriquin's and Sattar's first meeting, TF 4-31 IN embraced the local security movement and it would

¹²³ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 125.

¹²⁴ Petraeus, "Foreword," xii-xii.

pay dividends in the overall security of their sector as well as help stabilize the economy by providing a large number of men with legitimate employment.

The aftermath of 12 May provided enough breathing room for the populace to decide they wanted control of their own destiny. The local insurgent leader Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim, known for his brutality toward residents, was on the run and no longer able to control the population effectively. Freed from the presence of al Qaeda and Islamic State militants, at least temporarily, the locals were able to approach the task force with offers of cooperation.¹²⁵ While never a recommended technique in COIN, the mass detentions may have had a positive effect. Desiring not to go through that again and seeing an opportunity with the insurgents disrupted, the local populace largely decided they could improve their security and stability and put an end to the brutality of the local insurgents regime. Also, taking control of security presented a pathway to a future in which there were not large amounts of US soldiers patrolling streets, conducting raids and arresting locals. The residents likely desired to be left alone and standing up a Sons of Iraq group was an opportunity to rid themselves of Americans, insurgents and maybe even ISF in the long run. Thus when considering what factors enabled the rise of the Sons of Iraq, one must start with the explicit approval and encouragement of Petraeus. However, one must also acknowledge that the task force's control of the LOCs and its forward presence allowed for this, the mini-surge in response to 12 May set the conditions, and the movement of the new MND-C units to 2/10 MTN's periphery helped keep the area secure while the movement was in its infancy. It is also important not to

¹²⁵ Livermore, "Economy of Force," 195.

forget the willingness of the Polar Bears and locals to come together shortly after a tragic event for the US and IA soldiers and a fairly traumatic response for the locals. In this one can see the interworking of Petraeus, Odierno, and the tactical leaders to create an important movement.¹²⁶

Locals began manning checkpoints rapidly once the task force agreed. Company B commander Captain Christopher Vitale stated, “One morning we awoke and there they were, out guarding their streets.”¹²⁷ This greatly aided in the task force’s effort to transition security to Iraqis. Iraqis had control of about half of the battlespace originally allotted to 2/10 MTN by the end of the deployment. Kershaw told a group of reporters from Watertown, NY (the local town outside Fort Drum) on a teleconference that lack of ISF prevented the ability for more territory to be transitioned to the government of Iraq. He noted that Concerned Local Citizens (CLC, as the unit called the locals Sons of Iraq, helped make up for the lack of ISF presence. These security teams were also providing valuable intelligence.¹²⁸ Company D’s executive officer, First Lieutenant Douglas Livermore, stated that ISF could now count on cooperation with locals when patrolling the area.¹²⁹ This was something absolutely essential to the long-term stability of the

¹²⁶ While Odierno has less of a role in the establishment of Sons of Iraq, his positioning of forces around TF 4-31 IN and 2/10 MTN help shape the environment.

¹²⁷ Christopher Vitale, “Interview with MAJ Chris Vitale,” interview by US Army Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 4 October 2012, accessed 10 November 2016, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/2796/rec/4>.

¹²⁸ Chris McCann, “2nd BCT commander updates local communities,” *The Mountaineer*, 9 August 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

¹²⁹ Livermore, “Economy of Force,” 195.

region. Eventually more than 10,000 citizens would volunteer across 2/10 MTN's area of operations in the summer of 2007.¹³⁰

The CLC movement proved to be quite successful. Later that month, the task force made an attempt to co-opt that success by running an Iraqi Police (IP) recruiting drive out of the Yusufiyah Joint Security Station (JSS). The battalion was working in conjunction with 4/4/6 IA and members of the 23rd Military Police (MP) Company, 503rd MP Battalion, 16th MP Brigade, who partnered with the IPs at the JSS. Looking for 200 recruits, the task force ran a three day effort from 23 to 25 June that brought in 1,340 applicants, including one woman. The applicants were both Sunni and Shia and included members of every tribe in the area to include three Qarghulis. While not all applicants were from TF 4-31 IN's area of operations, the majority came from Yusufiyah and its close southern neighbor Mullah Fayad.¹³¹

Moving West

In July, with Yusufiyah-proper turned over to the IA and security improvements taking hold in the areas around the city, the battalion turned its eyes on the Euphrates River. Qarghuli Village and the frontier on the other side of the Euphrates River were not friendly areas, but in the months following the 12 May attack, focus and momentum shifted to the area. The battalion would place its weight behind securing the valley in the final months of the deployment.

¹³⁰ Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 227.

¹³¹ "Yusufiyah-area men flock to IP recruitment drive," *The Mountaineer Online*, 12 July 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

On 8 July, the battalion and 4/4/6 IA launched an assault across the river in Owesat in Anbar Province. Operation Polar Schism was aimed at a couple of mosques believed to harbor al Qaeda and intelligence began focusing on the area as a likely hiding place for the kidnapped soldiers.¹³² Then, for the first time, on 12 July, the IA led an operation, Polar Alpha, with minimal US assistance.¹³³ The US then led Operation Polar Tempest, another assault into Owesat, in mid-July. The operation featured a parallel element in conjunction with 4/4/6 IA operating al Thobat in the Yusufiyah area.¹³⁴ Around this time, the last of the additional forces brought in after the 12 May attack finally left resetting the area back to its original force structure with the addition of CLC. The mini-surge forces had slowly been trickling out up to this point.¹³⁵ Mid-July also saw the departure of B/2-69 AR, the attached mechanized infantry company. The unit turned PB Bataan over to the IA and went north to Patrol Base Lion's Den, no longer under the control of TF 4-31 IN.¹³⁶

That month, the battalion launched a major operation to clear the area surrounding the Yusufiyah Thermal Power Plant and seize the last outpost north of PB Inchon prior to

¹³² Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad*, 98.

¹³³ "Soldiers aid Iraqi Troops with Operation Polar Alpha," *The Mountaineer Online*, 19 July 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

¹³⁴ "Operation Polar Tempest detains 12, recovers weapons," *The Mountaineer Online*, 19 July 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer; there is no date given for this operation.

¹³⁵ Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon*, 183.

¹³⁶ Chris McCann, "Tanker troops move north, transfer patrol base to Iraqis," Defense Video and Imagery Distribution Center, 31 July 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.dvidshub.net/news.

the plant. In October 2006, soldiers from the Polar Bears' sister battalion had taken control of the power plant's main building and established PB Dragon after heavy fighting. However, within the concrete walls of the plant remained a large amount of uncontrolled buildings, ditches, storage units and other hiding spots. 2-14 IN maintained a presence but did not control the area. The plant was the location where two for the three 1/502 PIR soldiers were taken and tortured after being kidnapped. By the end of the operation, the battalion had control of the plant, collocating Company C's headquarters with the 2-14 IN element, and had established a new outpost designated BP 153. This gave them possession of the two large compounds at the extreme ends of their sector (PB Yusufiyah being the other) with two controlled LOCs, Route Malibu and the Mullah Fayad Highway, connecting the two bases.¹³⁷ The task force and its IA partners now manned the entire sector in a series of outposts reminiscent of the cavalry posts on the Great Plains in the 19th Century.¹³⁸

In early August, the task force headquarters, minus a rear element, moved from PB Yusufiyah to PB Dragon.¹³⁹ Company A remained behind to continue its training and mentorship role. Though Yusufiyah had officially been transferred to the ISF months

¹³⁷ Livermore, "Economy of Force," 195; Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon*, 187-195. Neither source provides a name or exact date for this operation, nor indicates whether IA partners contributed to the mission.

¹³⁸ Some of these bases were US only and others were IA only. The company headquarters at Inchon, Dragon, Shanghai, Yusufiyah, and Bataan (before its transfer) were all integrated.

¹³⁹ Liz Lopez, "Deployed soldiers do what it takes to accomplish mission," *The Mountaineer Online*, 16 August 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

before, this was the clearest indication that the IA owned it and that the Americans were only in a supporting role. With all of its tactical companies (B, C, and D) located closer to PB Dragon than PB Yusufiyah, the tactical shift was evident. That month the battalion would return to Owesat again to conduct Operation Polar Schism III.¹⁴⁰

Around this time, tensions flared amongst Sunni sects on the west side of the Euphrates over loyalty to al Qaeda. The al-Owesi tribe declared that it wanted to stand up its own CLC and the task force took advantage of the opportunity. In September, elements of Company D established PB 154 on the west bank of the Euphrates River.¹⁴¹ It would be the last outpost the battalion established and the farthest west they would go, completing the shift toward the Euphrates. The next month the task force began transferring authority of their area of operations to the 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), a unit with the same patch as 1/502 PIR. By the end of the November, all elements of the task force save for the two missing soldiers had returned home.

At the End

While one of the key elements of the Petraeus' strategy was getting soldiers out among the populace and creating additional bases, TF 4-31 IN in fact had one less base on 1 November than on 10 February 2007. Company A stood strong at PB Yusufiyah;

¹⁴⁰ 10th Mountain Division Public Affairs Office, "Operation Polar Schism III detains 22 in search for missing Soldiers," *The Mountaineer Online*, 16 August 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer. There is not reporting that indicates the battalion ever conducted an operation named Polar Schism II.

¹⁴¹ Livermore, "Economy of Force," 196.

Company B maintained its three bases, Company C had bounced around, first trading the bases along the Mullah Fayad Highway for COP Corregidor, and then Corregidor for PB Dragon and BP 153; and Company D added one base, in the al-Owesi tribal area across the Euphrates. The detachment of B/2-69 AR included the handing over of PB Bataan and is additional base along Route Sporster. Thus, the battalion handed over four bases to the IA, created two new bases in BPs 153 and 154, an assumed responsibility for PB Dragon though elements of 2-14 IN remained (see figure 3).

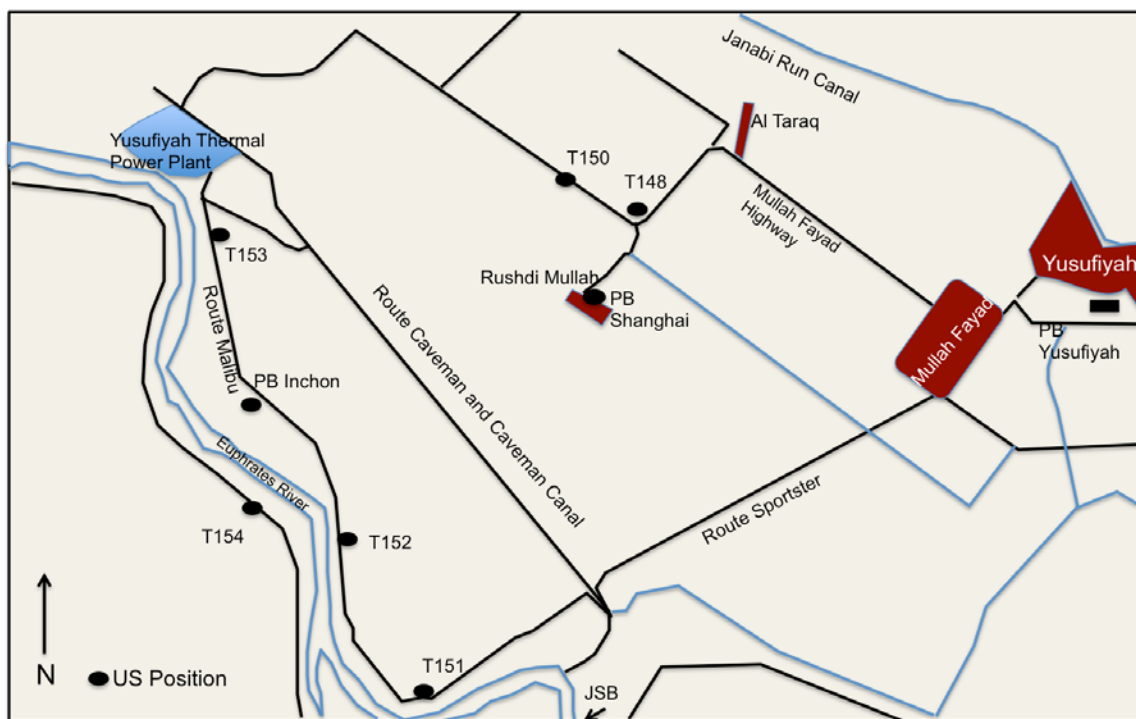


Figure 3. Yusufiyah Area of Operations 1 November 2007

Source: Created by Author. Author referenced Google Earth and Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010).

The task force conducted the same amount of stability operations in the second half of its deployment as it has the first (see table 3). It is unclear if any of these efforts were specifically request by Iraqis. Two of the three were partnered and one, in the eyes of the locals citizens at least, had Iraqis in the lead. While on the surface, six total stability operations seems paltry, the task force did conduct many direct engagements through its Civil Affairs team and its S5. Many of these projects were focused on the stability of Yusufiyah proper.¹⁴² The six stability operations listed in Table 3 only represent those the battalion dedicated significant planning and resources toward.

Table 3. TF 4-31 IN Stability Operations 10 Feb 07 –01 Nov 07				
Date	Type	Partnered?	Iraqi Led?	Requested?
Mid-April	Fertilizer Distribution	Y	Y	Unknown
15-Jun-07	Medical	Unknown	N	Unknown
22-Jun-07	Medical	Y	N	Unknown

Source: Created by Author.

In terms of offensive operations, the battalion participated in 15 as compared to nine the previous seven months (see table 4). This number represents a continuation of the battalion’s efforts combined with Petreaus’s and Odierno’s security-minded guidance and the increase in lift, ISR and attack assets provided by the creation of MND-C.

¹⁴² Chris McCann, “Yusufiyah Joint Security Station opens, hosts major projects meetings,” 2nd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office 6 May 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, commandsof2bct.blogspot.com/2007/05; 2nd Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office, “Yusufiyah infrastructure, hope improving,” 6 May 2007, accessed 19 April 2016, commandsof2bct.blogspot.com/2007/05.

Though many of these operations had direct or tangential ties to the search for the missing soldiers, it still provides a view to the effect of the Surge and the battalion's dedication to population security. Still, outside of patrols where Company A trainers participated as guides, there was only one operation the battalion conducted with the IA in the lead.

Table 4. TF 4-31 IN Offensive Operations 10 Feb 07 –01 Nov 07				
Operation	Date	Task	Partnered?	IA Led?
Polar Dagger	12-Feb-07	Cordon and Search	Unknown	N
Unnamed	16 - 17-Feb-07	Cordon and Search	Y	N
Polar Thunder	23-Feb-07	Capture	Unknown	N
Polar Deliverance/Dive	21-Apr-07	Search	Y	N
Commando Auger	Late Apr 07	Patrol Base	Y	N
Polar Scrum	1-May-07	Cordon and Search	Y	N
Polar Charade	Mid-May 07	Search	Y	N
Commando Razor	Mid-May 07	Search	Y	N
Commando Eagle	Late June 07	Search	Y	N
Polar Schism	8-Jul-07	Search	Y	N
Polar Alpha	12-Jul-07	Search	Y	Y
Polar Tempest	Mid-July 07	Search	Y	N
Unnamed	July 07	Patrol Base	Unknown	N
Polar Schism III	Mid-August 07	Search	Y	N
Unnamed	Sep-07	Patrol Base	Unknown	N

Source: Created by Author.

The heavy emphasis on operations is consistent with the tactical guidance Petraeus and Odierno published throughout their tenures starting with Petraeus' initial letter. On 19 March 2007 Petraeus followed up his initial guidance telling troops, "Improving security for Iraq's population is . . . the over-riding objective of your

strategy.” He added to this the need to clear and hold so the Iraqis could move forward with the build phase.¹⁴³ This generally describes the methodology of TF 4-31 IN. They focused on security, they cleared areas, and then they remained to provide security with the goal of allowing the populace to build. For them, holding an area meant remaining in forward bases and patrolling rigorously while establishing relationships with locals. Their actions are similar to establishing a police precinct rather than actions units undertook in Baghdad to fortify parts of the city from insurgents.

Odierno then issued a formal COIN guidance in April in memorandum. The guidance plainly states, “We must secure the population. This is our focus. It is the clearest, most visible demonstration of excellence in the practice of counterinsurgency.” In its concluding paragraph, the memorandum states, “Above all, protect the people who- for whatever reason-have made the irrevocable choice [to support the coalition].”¹⁴⁴ Petraeus, who had approved Odierno’s memorandum, continued reinforcing this message at every COIN academy class. The message from all of this was clear: the role of the tactical units was to protect the populace and this could be done much better through offensive operations than stability operations. Unlike Casey, who saw the path to security through stability, Petraeus and Odierno saw the path to stability through security.

Nor did the battalion forget its commander’s initial guidance to build a government. There were very few planned stability operations conducted at the battalion

¹⁴³ Carter Malkasian, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq” in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* edited by Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, 241-259 (New York: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2008), 258.

¹⁴⁴ Raymond Odierno, “Counterinsurgency Guidance,” accessed 20 February 2016, <http://council.smallwarsjournal.com>.

level, but the battalion made considerable effort to boost the government of Yusufiyah. The town was an ideal place for this because security existed in greater measure than out in the surrounding areas. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but evidence suggests that company commanders and platoon leaders took considerable effort to work with local leaders and to help provide services to the people. Still, the building of a government at the locals level was not a central focus of the Surge.

In plain terms, the net differences on the ground between Casey's and Petraeus' tenure are one less base with a significant portion of the area of operations handed over to IA or co-patrolled with CLC; no additional stability operations but two more partnered operations one in which the IA was nominally in the lead; and seven additional offensive operations, one of which was Iraqi led. Added to that is the addition of partnership with local security forces, something that the battalion had not explored prior to Petraeus.

Looking at these numbers, it would be easy to wonder what effect Petraeus and Odierno had. However, what the numbers demonstrate is that population-centric COIN tactics alone were not sufficient to bring about improved security. The next chapter will analyze why the battalion had more success improving security under Petraeus than Casey. The reader will be able to see the key difference between what the Surge accomplished and what may have been accomplished by just changing tactics. TF 4-31 IN clearly did not have a problem implementing COIN, but did not see real security improvement until after the full establishment of MND-C. Therefore, Chapter 5 will be instructive in the true effect of Surge.

CHAPTER 5

TO WHAT EFFECT?: WHAT THE SURGE REALLY DID

Evaluating the effect the Surge had on TF 4-31 IN, more specifically why it saw a dramatic increase in security, will help identify the true reasons the Surge achieved its security goals. As Chapter 4 has shown, the greatest direct tactical change in TF 4-31 IN's area of operations was the increase in offensive operations. While it would be a stretch to call TF 4-31 IN a model for how a battalion should conduct COIN, the task force clearly employed recognized and sound methods before the arrival of Petraeus. The guidance MNF-I and MNC-I published served more to reinforce what TF 4-31 IN was already doing than to shape it. Still, Yusufiyah remained volatile into Petraeus' tenure, so much so that the enemy could pull off a complex attack which killed five and captured three. This makes TF 4-31 IN an ideal great unit to study in order to understand what occurred at the operational and theater-strategic levels that enabled the tactical unit's success. Their story helps demonstrate how important it is to synchronize tactical efforts with operational and theater-strategic initiatives.

This thesis used mixed methods method to evaluate the Surge. It incorporates data previously presented with new data related to civilian and military casualties to form the quantitative component. The study then use statements from participants from Petraeus to the lowest available soldier, in this case Company B's Staff Sergeant Philip Sharp, to corroborate observations from the data. This process is similar to what Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro used in their article *Testing the Surge: Why*

Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?.¹⁴⁵ However, those scholars examined Iraq as a whole and did not study the role of tactics in any way. Their work also avoided any assessment of Odierno's actions. In general, *Testing the Surge*'s authors only looked at the troops surge and the Sons of Iraq, which counter to this thesis, the authors see as a movement separate from Petraeus.

Tactical Actions

Chapters 2 and 4 focused on the tactical actions the battalion undertook during its tour of duty. Under Casey, who wanted to consolidate the troops onto large FOBs, the Polar Bears gained a net of seven bases. Under Petraeus, who wanted to push troops out in to smaller COPs and PBs, the battalion netted one less base than under Casey (see table 5).¹⁴⁶ While the net difference is seemingly statistically insignificant it means a great deal in this context. One should glean three things from this. First, there was a disconnection between Casey's desire and what actually occurred. The former MNF-I commander has conceded that his focus was not on the operational employment of forces. What led commanders below him to avoid following his guidance is less clear. Second, Petraeus' arrival did not push all troops off of FOBs. It is hard to tell where TF 4-31 IN would have stopped under a different leader, but clearly he was not the impetus for all units to include 2/10 MTN, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar in 2005 under

¹⁴⁵ Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security*, 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 9.

¹⁴⁶ While there was a Joint Security Station in Yusufiyah, it eventually came under the control of a military police unit not officially controlled by TF 4-31 IN. Reporting on this base is sparse and it is unclear if it was built prior to Petraeus' arrival.

Colonel H. R. McMasters and 1st BCT, 1st Armored Division in Ramadi under Colonel Sean MacFarland 2006 to place soldiers in small outposts among the populace. Third, pushing out among the population was insufficient as a means of providing lasting security. While this study is limited to a single battalion task force, the idea that this alone could turn the war in a different direction is untenable. Even before the Polar Bears arrived in Iraq, 1-502 PIR and its sister battalions had pushed forward but had seen little if any success. It should also be noted that the number of bases in Yusufiyah under Petraeus was higher than the number under Casey given that the IA partners had inherited bases and the CLC had established checkpoints as well. Thus, it appears to be a mostly necessary first step in a methodical process of gaining security.

Table 5. TF 4-31 IN Tactical Actions Comparison			
Indicator	Under Casey	Under Petraeus	Net Difference
Bases	11	10	-1
Offensive Operations	9	15	6
Stability Operations	3	4	0

Source: Created by Author.

The most striking difference comes in the number of offensive operations conducted before and after Petraeus' assumption of command. The net difference of six represents a 66 percent increase. This challenges a common narrative that Petraeus brought with him a strategy of winning the "Hearts and Minds" of the Iraqis. In truth, there are no sources that directly quote Petraeus as having uttered that phrase. While the MNF-I and MNC-I commanders certainly saw the value in not antagonizing the

populace, they did not stake the war on the ability of soldiers to get people to like them. There was a difference between demanding that their troops act in accordance with the law and refrain from heavy-handed tactics and requesting their troops win over the hearts of the populace. Rather, Petraeus and Odierno focused on securing the populace. From 8 February 2007, when Odierno recommended to Petraeus a way ahead for Baghdad, the idea of security and legitimacy permeated all planning and operational documents. Odierno did not count quality of life measures among his priorities but his path to that was through government function not steps to gain the acceptance of the average Iraqi. His mission statement said that MNC-I would conduct combat, stability and support operations in that order, and his key tasks are primarily offensive in nature.¹⁴⁷ Everything released to the troops from that point echoed his sentiment.

What this ultimately demonstrates is that popular conceptions are wrong about the true nature of the Surge. The Surge's primary goal was to create the security environment that could enable political reconciliation. In truth, that is about as much as one should expect from a military force. There certainly were times when the military had to be a provider of services and governance, but that was not something MNC-I or MNF-I wanted to sustain. As noted COIN theorist David Galula, whose writing clearly influenced Petraeus and FM 3-24, writes, "To confine soldiers to purely military functions while urgent and vital tasks have to be done, and nobody else is available to undertake them, would be senseless. The soldier must then be prepared to become a propagandist, a social worker, a civil engineer, a school teacher, a nurse, a boy scout."

¹⁴⁷ Odierno, "MNC-I Inbrief General Petraeus."

However, as Odierno and Petraeus clearly understood, there was a limit to this. The following line to the previous quote is, “But only for as long as he cannot be replaced, for it is better to trust civilian tasks to civilians.” Soldiers were only to perform civil and social functions were a vacuum existed and only for as long as necessary.¹⁴⁸

The Surge’s primary goal was to create the security environment that could enable political reconciliation. Thus population security and offensive operations are not separate. Instead, the former is an essential part of the latter.¹⁴⁹ The security-centric approach Petraeus and Odierno adopted was not necessarily novel at the time. Certainly Petraeus had read Galula and Robert Thompson, both population-centric COIN theorists. Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) put forth the idea in December 2006 in an influential paper titled “Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq”. Kagan wrote the report for the AEI Iraq Planning Group. In it he advocated for the troop surge and proposed a deployment timeline and security strategy focused on Baghdad and Al Anbar province that is remarkably similar to what was later adopted.¹⁵⁰ Retired General Jack Keane, who played a key role in bringing the Surge about, was also on the AEI Iraq Planning Group. Additionally, in his speech announcing the Surge,

¹⁴⁸ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Metz, “Decision-Making in Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Strategic Shift of 2007,” Strategic Studies Institute, 20 May 2010.

¹⁵⁰ See Frederick W. Kagan, “Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq,” accessed 8 May 2016, www.aei.org.

President Bush stated that “[t]he most urgent priority for success in Iraq is security, especially in Baghdad.”¹⁵¹

The point of demonstrating that Petraeus was not unique in developing the population centric strategy is to show what the MNF-I commander truly was. He was not some COIN savant in a sea of COIN illiterates. Rather, he was the leader that pulled the best ideas together, gave purpose, direction and motivation, assumed risk and communicated. This is not to argue that Petraeus had not thought deep and hard about COIN; his PhD dissertation concerned the topic and he was the overseer of many COIN initiatives while in command of the Combined Arms Center, most notably FM 3-24. However, Petraeus surrounded himself with many individuals that were well versed in COIN and he acted as a conduit for many of their ideas.

The population centric approach was also not unique to Petraeus’ tenure. Casey’s plan focused on population security as well. What differed was how the two generals sought to achieve that end. Casey sought to speed up the generation and training of ISF in hopes they would provide security. His choice was an unknown quantity that he saw as more sustainable in the long run. Petraeus chose to employ US forces to stabilize the security situation. His choice was a known quantity that he knew was not sustainable for more than about 18 months. Petraeus would eventually look to Casey’s method as part of his end state, but believed he needed to gain control quickly and transition at a slower pace. Where Casey had taken tactical risks for strategic gain, Petraeus placed emphasis

¹⁵¹ George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” Office of the Press Secretary, 10 January 2007, accessed 20 February 2007, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>.

on the tactical and operational levels as a means to strategic success. For this reason, Petraeus provided more oversight at the levels below him than Casey had.

Petraeus' population-centric method required a forward presence, offensive operations, and an increase in the numbers, ability and capabilities of indigenous forces, both national and local. As Kershaw and Infanti had at their level, Petraeus looked to the tactical units to take a larger role in developing the ISF, relying on the generating system to function more along the lines of the United States' system. In terms of offensive operations, the 66 percent increase demonstrates an environment where the expectation from the top was to press the enemy. While some of the operations the task force conducted related to the 12 May 2007 attack, it seems likely based on the pace of operations prior to that and the increase in available helicopter assets that they would have conducted more operations regardless.

Odierno and Petraeus encouraged the increase in operations through their directives and enabled the increase through their actions. By creating a new division headquarters for the southern belts equipped with unmanned aerial surveillance systems and helicopters, the two generals allowed the task force to conduct more operations further away from large FOBs. The task force, otherwise foot- and vehicle-mobile, included helicopters in nearly all of its operations. Thus, the addition of the combat aviation brigade dedicated to the southern belts increased their ability to conduct large-scale operations.

It is natural to wonder why this change is not more attributable to Lynch, the MND-C commander, than Odierno or Petraeus. The answer is that there is little if any indication that beyond asset allocation-primarily helicopters-Lynch took any steps

himself to focus on 2/10 MTN's area of operations. While Lynch did aid in the mini-surge of forces after the 12 May attack and direct operations pursuant to the search, he directed no further operations in the area for the remainder of the Polar Bears' deployment. Dale Andrade's *Surging South of Baghdad*, which chronicles 3rd Infantry Division's deployment, is silent on any further operations in 2/10 MTN's area while describing large scale operations elsewhere. Lynch's own book, *Adapt or Die*, relatively boastful of the MND-C commander's contributions to the war, does not claim any credit for Yusufiyah. Neither is there an indication that Lynch provided additional guidance beyond that of his superiors that shaped TF 4-31 IN's operations. Historian Kimberly Kagan analyzed MND-C's impact on Baghdad and omitted any mention of TF 4-31 IN, 2/10 MTN or Yusufiyah.¹⁵² It is fair to point out that the operations Lynch did direct in the other parts of the belt certainly had positive effects on Yusufiyah, even if indirectly. However, this would not be to the degree of Odierno or Petraeus.

National and Local Partnership

The battalion's consistent employment of a population-centric security approach emphasized actions that safeguarding the populace and forcing out actors of instability such as insurgents, terrorists, and criminals. This is why the battalion aggressively built new patrol bases and conducted an ever-increasing number of operations. After conducting only one operation in the first three months, the battalion twenty-three in the final twelve. This also demonstrates the primary motivator for Infanti and Kershaw to dedicate such large portions of their forces to partnering with the IA. Petraeus and

¹⁵² Kagan, *The Surge*, 156-8.

Odierno would later reinforce this guidance with their directives. It further helps explain why a unit reeling from a coordinated attack would be willing to openly accept likely former insurgents (though probably not the hard liners) as official members of a local security force.

The CLC was the primary difference between the commands of Casey and Petraeus in terms of partnership. Prior to Petraeus' arrival, Kershaw had dedicated the bulk of his artillery battalion to the task of training, advising and assisting the 4th Brigade of the 6th Iraqi Division. Infanti dedicated the headquarters of Company A and one platoon from the company to same task, though in his case directed at the IA brigade's 4th battalion. While use of standard Army units operating in their own battlespace to training, advising and assisting the IA was not part of Casey's strategy, it is consistent with it. Casey saw the ISF as essential to long-term security. Petraeus and Odierno would place emphasis on the method TF 4-31 IN and 2/10 MTN employed, but not fundamentally change Casey's desire to build an IA able to operate independently. The difference was how and when. That is a difference of degree, not kind.

There were four battalion-level operations where the information is not available to determine whether or not IA partners joined Polar Bear soldiers. Even assuming those four did not include IA partners, it still leaves 84% of all battalion operations as partnered. All four in question occurred after Petraeus arrived therefore meaning he did not increase the task force's efforts to partner. It does appear that Petraeus and Odierno placed greater emphasis on combined IA/US patrols than Casey and any of his corps commanders, but this clearly did not affect the Polar Bears. Thus, Kershaw and Infanti, their staffs and their subordinate commanders, deserve considerable credit for their

efforts to partner with the IA. On a standard air assault, a nine-man squad of IA soldiers represented more than twenty percent of their available seats on the aircraft, demonstrating considerable commitment to their partnering initiative. Their efforts represent a potentially portable lesson for other COIN situations. Clearly, the IA benefited from training as units and operating next to their trainers. These efforts largely paid off with the transfer of authority of Yusufiyah proper from the US to the IA in May 2007.

Where he did affect partnership was the CLC. There is no indication that the Polar Bears were inclined to start a CLC movement prior to Petraeus. However, there is no indication that Casey was standing in the way of the Polar Bears or any other unit employing an Anbar Awakening-like movement. Casey mentioned in his memoir being happy with the development; he just did not take steps to fostered or spread it. Petraeus embraced the movement and spread it.

Petraeus' embrace of the movement represents an extraordinary acceptance of risk across the tactical, operational and theater-strategic levels. Tactically, there was the potential danger of arming locals, some with little training and others former insurgents. There was a risk of that the SOI could turn on the US forces and ISF. This appears not to have happened in any significant way, but events later in Afghanistan that came to be known Green-on-Blue attacks demonstrated the potential risks. Magnified, this became an operational risk. If entire SOI units turned on the US and Iraqi forces, regions could lose stability. At the theater-strategic level, there were two great risks. The first was for the SOI to turn into another sectarian militia thus creating a situation where the US had armed terrorists. The other was the chance to upset Shia government officials retarding

political efforts or to upset radical Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr potentially bringing his militia back as a sectarian army. Some have seen the Sons of Iraq initiative as a means of bribing Sunnis not to fight Coalition forces. However, the move represents an innovative approach to solving problems of security, employment, and legitimacy.

Some observers have seen the Sons of Iraq movement as something independent of the Surge. Biddle, Friedman and Shapiro make this argument in *Testing the Surge*. In the context of Al Anbar, they are certainly correct. However, Petraeus is the first known commander to have, on a large scale, coopted locals to provide security. He did this as commander of the 101st Airborne in Mosul, Iraq, in the months following the 2003 invasion.¹⁵³ After that, there were at least three other similar movements before the Anbar Awakening.¹⁵⁴ The four that occurred prior to MacFarland's efforts all were locally successful for a short period of time. None survived and none spread across the country. The difference between the previous four and MacFarland's movement was the sponsorship Petraeus applied to the Ramadi effort. Thus, it became a national program of local initiatives. It would be wrong to see the Sons of Iraq as a single entity. Each group was different with central control limited to necessary training, regulation, equipping and funding.

In Yusufiyah, the addition of the CLC has a much more rapid effect on security and stability than any other endeavor taken at the theater, operational or tactical levels. It succeeded for several reasons in Yusufiyah. Beyond Petraeus' efforts were factors such

¹⁵³ See Ricks, *Fiasco*, Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, and Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*.

¹⁵⁴ Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, *Testing the Surge*, 18.

as the security provided by the temporary troop surge after the 12 May 2007 attack and the willingness of the unit to accept them at all levels. Also important was the work put in prior to the acceptance of the CLC. The unit was properly positioned to oversee the movement.

While it is likely that Petraeus and Odierno increased partnership efforts across Iraq, in the case of 2/10 MTN and TF 4-31 IN, they had little effect when considering ISF. However, the two-and Petraeus in particular-had a considerable effect on partnership when looking at the local level.

Improved Security

TF 4-31 IN presents an interesting study for COIN during OIF. From its first operation, the task force conducted a rigorous, population security-centric approach. Unit leadership pushed soldiers into the villages amongst the populace, enforced partnership with IA soldiers and directed offensive operations to clear enemy fighters and establish an enduring presence. As a secondary measure, the battalion dedicated assets and personnel to enable governance, primarily in the city of Yusufiyah where they were able to transfer authority for security within ten months. The battalion saw tactical success in imposing its presence, improving the ability of the IA and gaining control of important LOCs. Still, there is a noticeable difference in the security situation in the Yusufiyah region once the Surge fully took affect. Until then, insurgents were able to pull off a complex attack that indicated a low level of security or stability.

One of the strongest quantitative indicators of this is the average number of civilians killed per month. In the first eight months of 2006, there were forty civilian deaths attributed to the Yusufiyah area of operations with no months outside of standard

deviation from the mean. Thus under 1-502 PIR the average monthly civilian toll was five. In the months between the task force assuming authority for the Yusufiyah area of operations and the arrival of Petraeus, the number of deaths was 49 with two outliers of 14 in a single day and eight another. This comes to an increased monthly average of 8.16 deaths. Though the outliers skew these numbers, they also indicate a lack of security. From the start of the Surge to the beginning of October, there were 47 deaths-34 of which occurred after May 2007 with one outlier of 12 in a day. This comes to an average of 6.7 deaths per month. While still higher than prior to the unit's arrival, this may represent one of two things. Either it could be that deaths were not as reported as well prior to a stronger occupation of Yusufiyah or may be an indication that increased presence meant increased violence. From 1 October to the end of 2007, there were a total of 10 deaths for an average of 3.3 per month.¹⁵⁵

The drop in civilian casualties is a significant statistic through it is a small sample. Certainly, as the task force pushed into the area, violence appears to have increased. A similar effect occurred across Iraq at the beginning of the Surge, with casualties in each month from April to August 2007 topping the numbers from the first three months of the

¹⁵⁵ IraqBodyCount.org provided raw data on civilian deaths in Babil province to the author who later collated them into the statistics presented. Numbers are for all casualties listed as occurring in Yusufiyah listed within the "Babylon" (Babil) statistics group. Numbers come from English language sources so may not be complete and potentially could represent deaths not actually in the Polar Bears' area of operations. The author removed three casualties from the figures because the numbers represented the deaths of CLC in their capacity as security personnel.

year.¹⁵⁶ In the case of Yusufiyah, the increased civilian casualties likely relates to al Qaeda and other operatives attacking civilians to intimidate them through some of these casualties were the direct result of US forces. The decrease after the start of the Surge demonstrates an increase in security but the numbers are still high after the establishment of the CLC. Insurgents and terrorists were still able to conduct a mass killing during this time. Without this outlier, the drop becomes much steeper. Still, it demonstrates that civilians were targets throughout and that the CLC may have had immediate impacts in the form of reduced attacks and safer LOCs but that they did not immediately curtail violence.

While the number of civilian casualties fell, soldiers saw a more tangible indicator of security in the form of soldier deaths. The task force lost 21 soldiers to enemy actions during the deployment.¹⁵⁷ Twenty of these soldiers died prior to the end of May 2007 which is around the time that the final Surge effects took place in the southern belts.¹⁵⁸ The battalion's killed in action represented five percent or one in every twenty US soldiers killed in Iraq in both April (117 across Iraq) and May (131). After May, the battalion lost one soldier to enemy action in July representing less than one percent of

¹⁵⁶ These numbers come from iCasualties.org. Some of this increase is attributable to the winter being traditionally less dangerous than other months but mostly is attributable to increased troop presence.

¹⁵⁷ Figures on US casualties are courtesy of iCasualties.org (collated by the author and cross referenced with names from Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon* and include soldiers who units were under the operational control of TF 4-31 IN at the time of death.

¹⁵⁸ The author has included the deaths of Joseph Anzack, Byron Fouty, and Alex Jimenez in this number. These soldiers were captured in the 12 May attack. Their bodies were later discovered after this time and their exact date is unknown, but the actions leading to their death occurred in this time frame.

casualties that month. Its final three months would see no casualties. Prior to mid-May, the battalion averaged more than two deaths per month; after May, the battalion averaged one death per five months.¹⁵⁹

May 2007 was also the peak in US casualties for the entire Iraq theater of operations. It was the third bloodiest month of the war, exceeded only by April and November 2004. The general operations of the battalion task force did not change after Petraeus' arrival, but their own security did despite actually pushing further into the populace after May. It is remarkable that the battalion had no soldier killed or seriously wounded operating and later living on the west bank of the Euphrates River with a major linear obstacle preventing rapid reinforcement. Thus, the importance of the Surge becomes apparent. What the battalion did not have prior to late May was a full saturation of surveillance aircraft, units guarding their borders, increased lift capacity, and, ultimately the Sons of Iraq. The establishment of a CLC-like organization in the al Owesi tribal area enabled the security of US soldiers. Without the Surge effects it is possible that TF 4-31 IN could continue to employ rigorous population security measures and still not realize any gains in security. This demonstrates the weakness of COIN tactics alone. To be effective long-term, there must be some form of border control and a sizeable security force. Even in Al Anbar province, which gained so much notoriety for the Awakening, this was true. The brigade ultimately lost nearly 100 soldiers prior to the Surge and received two additional Marine battalions as part of the troop increase.

¹⁵⁹ These numbers do not include one soldier lost to a non-enemy caused vehicle accident.

It is telling that these security improvements lasted beyond TF 4-31 IN's tour of duty in Iraq. The battalion handed authority to the 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment in October. On 1 November 2007 the unit lost its first soldier to an IED. She would be the only soldier the battalion lost in its 15-month tour.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, these tangible measures of security were not temporary.

These statistics represent a strong quantitative indicator of increased security. However, when considering people, the qualitative factor is always important. It is not enough to simply make a place more secure; people must believe in and feel that security. Unfortunately, there are no surveys or polls from Yusufiyah to indicate how people perceived the area. There was, however, a series of nationwide polls of Iraqis conducted for ABC News and the BBC among others that took data in 2004, 2005, February and August 2007, and March 2008. These polls indicate the Iraqis believed their lives were worse from 2005 on hitting a low in August 2007 and then rising above the February 2007 level in March 2008. These polls find similar results for expectations of how Iraqis viewed their lives a year from when each poll was taken.¹⁶¹

US servicemembers, who likely did not see the drop in civilian casualties but were keenly aware of US killed and wounded, tended to feel the security situation improve. TF 4-31 IN chaplain Jeff Bryan, who likely was the most aware of casualties across the task force save for the commander, recounts in his memoir how there were less enemy in the area and how attacks became rare. Doug Livermore, Company D's

¹⁶⁰ iCasaulties.org.

¹⁶¹ Global Policy, "Iraq Poll March 2003," accessed 9 May 2016, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0308opinion.pdf>.

executive officer, would go on to write that when he left Yusufiyah for home he had “departed a country substantially more stable” than when he had first arrived. Leaders in Company B also remarked on the increased security.¹⁶²

People outside of Yusufiyah took notice of the improved security as well. Retired Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security and an author of an influential book on COIN in Malaya and Vietnam, and Captain Adam Scher, a member of the brigade that relieved 2/10 MTN wrote nearly a year after TF 4-31 IN departed that the Triangle of Death was now the “Triangle of Love”. Petraeus’ executive officer Colonel Peter Mansoor recalled that Petraeus renamed the area the “Circle of Love” due to reduced violence.¹⁶³ While the name is a bit corny, it speaks to the fact that not only was the area more secure, but people felt it to be more secure.

The decline in US casualties and the increase in the CLC correlate strongly. The addition of the CLC seems to have a much more rapid effect on the security and stability of Yusufiyah than any other endeavor undertook. The numbers alone cannot prove causation, but statements and assessment from leaders on the ground help make this link. Company B commander Captain Christopher Vitale related in a 2012 interview that his company made steady progress in Rushdi Mullah and the surrounding hamlets throughout the first ten months of the deployment. They had gained the trust of locals and

¹⁶² Bryan, *Memoirs from Babylon*, 197; Livermore, “Economy of Force,” 196; Sharp, 200; Vitale, “Interview.”

¹⁶³ John Nagl and Adam Scher, “How to smooth the transition in Iraq,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 October 2008, accessed 20 April 2016, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2008/1006/p09s02-coop.html>; Mansoor, *Surge*, 156.

been able to reduce the number of indirect fire attacks on PB Shanghai. However, they still received direct fire attacks on their patrols daily. These direct fire attacks ceased “instantly” once the Sons of Iraq stood up.¹⁶⁴ Staff Sergeant Philip Sharp, a squad leader in Vitale’s company, reflected in 2012 that “[t]he American military accomplished a lot of things over there [Iraq], but it didn’t put the nail in the coffin of the insurgents like the Sons of Iraq and the people who were fed up and decided to do something about it.”¹⁶⁵

Admittedly, Company B had been pressing the enemy much longer and built up a larger relationship with the local populace, enabling them to make a smoother transition to local security. Company D, however, did not complete its move to Quarghuli Village until three months after Company B set up in Rushdi Mullah. Even then the battalion used Company D as an economy of force mission for much of the first ten months and there appeared to be a tenuous relationship with locals into May. Still, Company D soldiers noticed a difference with Iraqis taking the fight to al Qaeda and other groups almost immediately.¹⁶⁶ Livermore commented on the “relative peace” the CLC brought to the area.¹⁶⁷ He also noted that IA soldiers—largely Shia—could patrol Qarghuli Village—largely Sunni—with support of locals.

The cynic’s response to this might be that the attacks and peace came because the US was paying insurgents off. However, there are three counters to this. First, when the

¹⁶⁴ Vitale, “Interview.”

¹⁶⁵ Sharp, *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire*, 196.

¹⁶⁶ Sasser, *None Left Behind*, 291-2.

¹⁶⁷ Livermore, “Economy of Force,” 195.

CLC first stood up it was a volunteer force without guarantee of pay. Second, civilian attacks continued to remain high (even if lower than before) and took time to begin to drop below pre-TF 4-31 IN levels. If Sunnis were guarding their own, there should not have been any danger to civilians. Third, participants comment on the positive effect of the CLC as a force. While it certainly helped employing those who otherwise would attack Americans, it was not the only reasons security improved.

Employing the CLC leveraged the indigenous nature of the locals and the manpower that they could bring. While the largely Shia city of Yusufiyah employed a Joint Security Station and the IA for security, the surrounding areas needed Sunnis who knew the Sunni-dominated area. The additional manpower greatly aided a still growing ISF and manpower capped US force by being able to cover more area than otherwise possible. The locals could also identify outsiders, a skill neither the IA nor US soldiers possessed. Their addition was certainly a major factor in the increased security but it is insufficient to explain the increase on its own. It also aided the eventual transition from US troops to Iraqis in the lead. As Stephen Metz, Chairman of the Regional Studies Department at the US Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute notes, "outsiders can *influence* the outcome, but only locals can *determine* it."¹⁶⁸

The CLC provided a wealth of additional security for a task force responsible for a wide area security mission with a widely dispersed population. It also helped enfranchise the Sunni Qarshulis who were former Baathists now being overseen by the Shia they once looked down on. However, the CLC alone could not have survived and

¹⁶⁸ Metz, "Decision-Making," 4.

been successful. The additional brigades played a very large role. Trends prior to the Surge demonstrated that when US forces moved into an area during an operation, violence would drop. However, this was unsustainable because US forces generally could not hold the area and control it long-term nor could the ISF.¹⁶⁹ In general, the US forces in these operations would return to their FOBs. TF 4-31 IN, on the other hand, had laid the foundation for security by living among the populace, but civilian casualties increased. This was because the frontier nature of their boundaries left many paths for enemy movement in and out of the area and extended distribution of the population made it hard to provide a favorable enough troop-to-resident ratio that might enable a more stable security situation.

While no additional US forces or ISF units found their way into the Yusufiyah area of operations, the area benefited greatly from the troop surge. Here, the credit goes in large measure to Odierno and his staff. Prior to Petraeus arriving, Odierno's staff had identified the danger the Baghdad belts presented to the stability of the capital. One there was indication that he may receive five additional brigades, Odierno had his staff develop a plan for their use. Though many observers believed all five brigades should or would go to Baghdad, the MNC-I staff believed some forces should go into the belts. It was an operation risk; Baghdad was a major concern and represented about a quarter of the population so diverting any additional assets could derail the mission. Petraeus ultimately accepted the risk and approved the diverting of two brigades to the belts and standing up the Multi-National Division-Center to provide oversight. With the additional troops in

¹⁶⁹ Metz, "Decision-Making," 16.

Baghdad providing a forward presence and the units on TF 4-31 IN's periphery eliminating sanctuaries, the population security measures in the greater Yusufiyah area could now be effective. If the Polar Bears and their national and local Iraqis partners pursued the enemy and pushed them out of their territory, the enemy now had to enter territory controlled by other Iraqi or US forces rather than move into sanctuary. There was no longer any place to hide. This, combined with the additional surveillance and lift capabilities MND-C brought and the increased oversight provided by the CLC, created a formula for a clear stabilization of the area of operations.

The Surge from the Top

In their article, *Testing the Surge*, Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro come to a similar conclusion. They analyze the decreasing violence across Iraq from the perspective of the Sons of Iraq, the troops surge, and the theory that sectarian violence had purified neighborhoods to the point there was no one left to kill. The authors reject the final argument about purified neighborhoods and posit that the drop in violence in Iraq was due to what they call the synergy of the Anbar Awakening and the troop surge. However, their analysis of the Surge considers only the new tactics and additional troops. They omit leadership and many other factors that this thesis considers.¹⁷⁰ The authors fall short by seeking a simplistic solution. This thesis has demonstrated that new tactics were insufficient with respect to TF 4-31 IN. Also, the value of the additional troops were contingent on them being employed properly, not just placed in Iraq. It was Odierno's vision that made the troops successful. Casey did not

¹⁷⁰ See Biddle, "Testing the Surge."

intend to use the troops in the way Odierno ended up using them. When offered the additional troops, Casey developed a plan to send two Marine battalions to Anbar and two BCTs to Baghdad to mostly train ISF. The rest would remain in reserve.¹⁷¹

There is another important thing to consider: Petraeus and Odierno did not implement the doctrine from FM 3-24 wholesale. While Petraeus did issue guidance to troops on the day he took command of MNF-I, it was not until several weeks later that the headquarters began issuing more comprehensive guidance. Odierno's staff had worked on the problem since December 2006 and continued their efforts after Petraeus approved their course of action; Petraeus' Commander's Initiatives Group and other staff members analyzed the problem before Petraeus issued formal guidance. Petraeus' experience in developing the FM 3-24 likely contributed to his approach more than the manual itself. As the manual relates best practices and Petraeus edited it, it is doubtful he physically referenced the manual when developing his concept.

The employment of new tactics seems somewhat overemphasized given that at least three brigades in the Casey era employed what would eventually be recognized as sound counterinsurgency approaches: McMaster's 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar, MacFarland's 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division in Ramadi and 2/10 MTN in the Triangle of Death. Even 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, the unit that preceded 2/10 MTN in the southern belt, despite issues, demonstrated a dedication to certain COIN tactics. Further, Casey's COIN academy had been teaching commanders tactics and techniques for the fight they were in. Certainly, some units altered their daily operations

¹⁷¹ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 36; Metz, "Decision-Making," 19.

after the Surge was announced; Kilcullen affirms this. However, Petraeus' effect on the tactical level appears to lie more in getting soldiers back among the populace and pushing them to smaller COPs and FOBs than changing how they operated. A larger study would likely show that some units changed their approach under Petraeus, but this study does not.

The most important things that Petraeus and Odierno brought to Iraq was a different view of the problem and the willingness to accept prudent risk in implementing a new approach. Critics of Casey have generally identified him as someone who did not understand COIN, but the truth is he seems to have had a decent, though not strong, grasp of the subject and he took steps to ensure his subordinates understood it as well.

However, Casey and his staff saw the problem different than Petraeus and his staff eventually would. Casey's view was that the precondition for security was political and economic stability; Petraeus saw that in reverse. Stephen Metz argues that Casey had the right strategy for what America faced in 2005 but not for what Iraq faced in 2006 as the situation transitioned from an anti-American insurgency to an insurgency focused against the Shia majority.¹⁷² Thus, Casey failed to adjust his strategy to the situation at hand. It is important to note that Casey saw the change but it only reinforced his belief that US soldiers were inappropriate means to a solution.¹⁷³ Casey and Petraeus looked at the same problem and saw it completely differently.

¹⁷² Metz, "Decision-Making," 40.

¹⁷³ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 108.

Because of his view of the problem, Casey saw the path to security through the accelerated generation and training of ISF and believed that the presence of US forces exacerbated the situation by delaying Iraqis from taking charge and giving motivation to Iraqis and outsiders to continue to fight against ISF and US troops. Much of the way Casey saw the problem was from his previous experience in Bosnia where he seems to have misinterpreted the situation. Despite extensive staff work, his interpretation of Bosnia shines throughout his decisions. Petraeus believed that US forces needed to be more visible to the average Iraqi and that a greater US troops presence in the short-term would lead to a long-term success. The final decision of Iraq's fate would ultimately be in the hands of the Iraqis, but Petraeus rightly saw that the ISF were not ready at the time.

Once they settled on a new way forward, Petraeus and Odierno accepted significant risk to ensure success. Odierno diverted a division headquarters, two brigades of armored and mechanized troops and a combat aviation brigade into the belts despite the general belief that Baghdad needed these resources.¹⁷⁴ Petraeus underwrote Odierno's risk and accepted much of his own. The CLC was a concept unproven on a national scale. While it had demonstrated success for nearly half of a year, Anbar remained dangerous. Additionally, the concept had failed to sustain success at least four times previously. With Petraeus' blessing the movement spread like wildfire. This threatened relations with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and played loose with the mandate President Bush gave him. Early in the process, MNF-I did not inform the government of Iraq about their

¹⁷⁴ The 3rd Infantry Division headquarters was slated to go to northern Iraq, not Baghdad.

dealings with the Sons of Iraq.¹⁷⁵ There was also additional risk of arming and providing money to former insurgents who could easily turn on US forces or the largely Shia ISF.

Another key aspect was the unity of effort that developed under Petraeus that does not appear to have existed under Casey. Casey was not aloof when it came to tactics and operations in Iraq, but did not take the same steps Petraeus did to ensure his subordinate units were operating in accordance with his vision. Casey's focus on political and economic issues created an environment where most of the military operations were under the purview of his corps commander. This does not mean that all military actions were uncoordinated but the evidence is clear that Petraeus and Odierno were in synch in a way that Casey and his four different corps commanders were not.¹⁷⁶ Odierno vigorously took Petraeus' vision and turned it into action. Petraeus sold the vision to his troops and anyone else who would listen while Odierno put it into practice. Their working relationship is amazing given incidents the two had had in the past.¹⁷⁷ In fact, that Odierno emerged as a successful leader in a COIN fight demonstrates a remarkable turn around from his heavy-handed days as a division commander in the immediate aftermath of the US-led invasion in 2003.¹⁷⁸

In a conflict that has been variously described as a “company commander’s war”, a “lieutenant’s war” and a “sergeant’s war”, among others, the importance of the

¹⁷⁵ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 204.

¹⁷⁶ Odierno was not the only corps commander Petraeus' had, but the only one there during 2/10 MTN's time.

¹⁷⁷ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 130-2.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

operational and theater-strategic levels of war are starkly apparent. Yes, the soldier on the ground was important as an individual in a manner the US rarely saw in previous conflicts because one or a small group could commit actions that had negative strategic consequences. Small level leaders were important as well.

The population security measures the task force put into place required a large number of junior leaders to make decisions without direct oversight from higher headquarters. The battalion had almost as many bases as platoon leaders, requiring a significant dispersal of small unit leaders. Without these leaders making tactically and ethically sound decisions, no amount of emphasis or leadership from the battalion commander on up would have made much of a difference. However, TF 4-31 IN and its sister battalions 2/10 MTN operated in a tiny part of a large sea. Until other US forces, ISF and, eventually, CLC occupied the water around them; their work could not completely calm the sea. It took the units around them acting in concert to truly see progress.

Odierno orchestrated this armed with Petraeus' intent and top cover. Though Petraeus supervised military affairs, it was Odierno who put most of the coalition military forces into action. For tactical actions to have enduring effect, it required the coordination of Odierno at the operational level. While each area of Iraq had distinct characteristics and needs, there was still a need to employ operational art-to link tactical actions together-to achieve lasting security results. Even those pre-Surge "COIN-successes", most notably Tal Afar, were far from secure prior to Odierno's assumption of command. Ninewah province, where Tal Afar is located, was one of the four provinces that Casey

listed as problematic during his tenure.¹⁷⁹ While McMaster brigade achieved security gains, it was not sustained. While there was a temporary winter dip in civilian casualties during McMaster's tour, the area became progressively more violent over the next two years, with huge spikes in 2007. It would not be until late 2010 that Ninewa saw violence return to the number seen in the Winter 2005-6 season. Anbar, also touted for its success, saw large spikes in civilian deaths in 2007 as well.¹⁸⁰ It took more than a sound tactical approach to bring violence to a level that enabled governance and economic expansion.

Bringing enduring security to Yusufiyah required a confluence of sound tactics by the responsible unit, partnership with the ISF, synchronization from the corps and oversight by the strategic commander. It involved risk at the tactical, strategic and operational levels. It was a solution that involved US forces, national Iraqis forces and local Iraqi citizens. There is no single reason why violence dropped during this time; study of TF 4-31 IN provides no panacea. Rather, it demonstrates that success requires a strong synchronization of all levels of war and a commitment to the approach from all commanders. Tactical success is meaningless when not reinforced at the operational level; a great operational approach is useless if the tactical units do not adhere to the proper principles.

¹⁷⁹ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 111.

¹⁸⁰ Statistics in both cases comes from the IraqBodyCount.org database.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Iraq during this time demonstrates the necessity of two levels of war, tactical and operational, and a bridging level, theater-strategic, to work in unison in order to accomplish military goals. This study did not explore, outside of context, the strategic level and political actions during this time. However, comprehensive study of 20th century COIN operations will demonstrate the importance of the strategic-political goals to be clear and all levels to be nested under it. This analysis is limited to military actions that led to improved security during the Surge. There is no panacea nor is there a single answer for why the Surge brought improved security to Iraq in 2007 and 2008. However, the most important part of the Surge is the coordination of all levels. This study also demonstrates the limits of military action in a war where politics and governance reign supreme. Ten years after TF 4-31 IN first deployed to Yusufiyah, the country is far from a stable environment by any measure. In conventional wars, the military usually can be the decisive instrument of national power. However, in a counterinsurgency the military can only shape the final decision.

This study has focused on one area of operations: Yusufiyah, Babil Province, Iraq, and how the tactical unit responsible for it as well as the commanders above that unit shaped it. It does not tell the whole story of the pre-Surge or Surge-era military operations in Iraq. The goal was to understand Petraeus' effect on a single tactical unit. The initial hypothesis was that Petraeus altered the tactical approach of the unit in some fundamental way; the end result being that Petraeus had enormous effect on the unit, but he had little effect, if any, on their tactical approach. This made the study more

interesting because it countered the narrative of new tactics being responsible for the increased security in and around Baghdad in the summer of 2007.

Along the way, I decided to, on the advice of advisors, to focus on General Raymond Odierno as well. It became clear that Odierno did not receive the credit he deserved nor was there any real analysis on him in most other sources. In *The Gamble*, Ricks provides the best treatment on Odierno from a non-interested party. Emma Sky, Odierno's political advisor at MNC-I, provides the most detailed view of the general. A big man with a big personality, Odierno was often overshadowed in the media by the more compact, more cerebral Petraeus in articles, books and the news. Still, his impact was great. Without Odierno or another corps commander able to turn Petraeus' vision into action it is hard to believe that Petraeus could have convinced all units to conduct missions with the same goals using similar tactics. Odierno seemed an unlikely person to carry out Petraeus intent given their documented mutual animosity as division commanders in northern Iraq in 2003. Thus, Odierno's reinvention as an enlightened COIN leader is quite remarkable and commendable.

Contrasting Casey and Petraeus as the chiefs of MNF-I presents a chance to study the role of a theater commander. Both generals involved themselves in all instruments of national power. Casey's memoir is explicit on this point. Petraeus has not written a memoir, but the evidence is clear that he involved himself in diplomacy, economics and information as well as military affairs. However, Casey appears to have placed less emphasis on the military aspect than Petraeus despite describing his close relationship with Ambassadors Negroponte and Khalilzad. Petraeus' emphasis on the military aspect appears much stronger. Casey did heavily emphasize the role of the Multi-National

Security Transition Command-Iraq as an ISF generating force, but sought to reduce the role of MNC-I. There is still a need for the theater commander to focus on non-military instruments of national power as they all relate, but military commander cannot become so involved in diplomacy, economics and information that they lose focus on military actions. To that point, the theater commander and ambassador must have a strong working relationship.

The place of the theater commander is also something that must be worked out. OIF was the first large-scale, enduring conflict under the current geographic combatant command construct. Although the war in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, began before OIF, Afghanistan remained a small operation in comparison to Iraq. There was no real precedent for the role of a theater commander under the Goldwater-Nichols reforms. CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks, Abizaid's predecessor, led the invasion just like General Norman Schwarzkopf had led operations against Iraq in 1991. After the invasion, Franks retired and Abizaid became the CENTCOM commander and newly promoted corps commander, LTG Ricardo Sanchez, took the reins in Iraq. It became apparent that a corps was not capable of running a war and the US created MNF-I and installed Casey as the commander, still reporting to Abizaid. When Petraeus came on board, he was still beholden to CENTCOM, then under Admiral Fox Fallon.

While each of these commanders had secure video teleconferences with the president, only Franks had a direct link in the chain of command to the president and SecDef. Though described as a theater in the Global War on Terrorism, Iraq at the time was the most pressing operation on the globe. As the war went on, the president took a more direct oversight role and Casey enjoyed better access to the president than Sanchez

and Petraeus better than Casey. Still, Petraeus had to fight for resources against Fallon even after the president announced a major shift in strategy. There became a point where Iraq transcended the role of the geographic combatant commander and became something solely under the purview of the MNF-I commander. There needs to be a statutory ability for the president, whether in his mandate for use of force or codified in federal law, to be able to set up a headquarters independent of any combatant command. This study has found no evidence that Abizaid or Fallon enhanced the abilities of Casey or Petraeus to lead.

Casey saw himself as a strategic leader. So did Petraeus.¹⁸¹ They do not appear to be operational level commanders but are not grand strategic leaders. This demonstrates a gap in the levels of war and the roles of theater commanders. This study has referred to the level of war MNF-I was responsible for as the theater-strategic level, a bridge between operational and strategic. While I do not propose the creation of a fourth level of war, it is clear that Iraq fails in the face of concepts developed around mass troop movements in the Russo-Japanese War. In a conventional war, Odierno would be a tactical commander atop MNC-I. However, he linked tactical actions in a way that appears much more like an operational commander. Similarly, the commander of a theater of war in a conventional conflict would be an operational commander. In Iraq, though, the commander of MNF-I had more than simple military matters to consider. Casey and Petraeus seem to fall short of being strategic leaders in a national sense, as they did not make policy or have control of the military, but come above the role of

¹⁸¹ Petraeus, "Interview," 75.

operational commanders. In a COIN environment, there may need to be consideration of this role and the potential for there to be a bridging level to understand the place of a commander that does not make policy but must put all elements of national power to use.

Petraeus provides a good example of what a theater commander can do to affect battalions and brigades. While he did not directly change the tactics of TF 4-31 IN, he may have helped them stay on course. Despite a few potentially harmful actions post-12 May such as destroying bridges, the Polar Bears remained committed to the principles that guided them which were in line with the MNF-I commander's vision. In the face of tragedy, this dedication to COIN may have at least something to do with Petraeus' efforts. His messaging reinforced the behavior of the unit. Measuring the effectiveness of information on soldiers is difficult. However, it is clear that Petraeus had a grasp of it, especially with regards to using the media and internal command information techniques, in a way that American generals have not had in a long time. The commander found a way to speak directly to the people and the soldiers to get his message across. Much of the Surge was about buying time for the political process; to a degree, Petraeus' messaging was about buying time to allow the Surge to buy time for the Iraqi politicians. To give the Surge a chance, the American people and their representatives needed to support it. For those people to support it, American soldiers needed to wholeheartedly implement his vision. With Odierno on board, Petraeus did just that.

Petraeus did many things well with respect to communications and information. He had his staff challenge questionable reporting by calling the reporters to task. He not only visited units, but had private session with company level leaders to get the real story. He sent out members of his staff to help coach. He did not shy away from the spotlight.

While this may have earned him the ire of peers who may have seen him as a glory hound, it provided him a perfect platform to tell his side of the story.

Petraeus also worked with the service chiefs and the CENTCOM commander to get the forces and capabilities needed in Iraq, as shown in Chapter 3. Without his persistence, it is possible none of the positive security effects TF 4-31 IN saw would have occurred. Had he not received all five BCTs and instead received only the two slated for deployment, it is improbable that he would have allowed Odierno to divert any of this combat power to the belts. As much as the southern belt affected Baghdad, the capital was still the most in need. Therefore, it is unlikely he would have approved standing up a new division headquarters to administer the belts where only 2/10 MTN operated on the eastside of the Euphrates. 4th Brigade (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division operated to the south and west of 2/10 MTN on the opposite side of the river and would become part of MND-C, but they were not really in the belt. Petraeus still would likely have pursued the Sons of Iraq, though without the security effects provided by the additional troops, it is questionable whether this effort would have taken hold in Yusufiyah. Of course, all of this is counterfactual, but it demonstrates the importance of Petraeus to the unit even if they did not change their tactics.

Petraeus and Casey both accepted enormous risk. Casey's most prominent risk was accelerating the generation of ISF, sacrificing quality for speed and quantity. Petraeus' greatest risk was the Sons of Iraq movement. It is possible that Petraeus' worked and Casey's did not because the former's was a Sunni solution to a largely Sunni problem and the latter's was a Shia solution to a largely Sunni problem. Casey's risk suffered from two false assumptions. First, he assumed that American soldiers were the

problem. Second, he dismissed the sectarian nature of Iraq and bet on that ISF troops would be seen as legitimate. Petraeus' solution enfranchised Sunni's and gave them a more direct role in their affairs. Some see the Sons of Iraq as a bride and will say that Petraeus succeeded by paying off insurgents. However, Sunni on Sunni violence continued after the establishment of the Sons of Iraq. Petraeus' solution took into account two things very important to Iraqis: local governance and religion; Casey's, consciously or not, ignored these aspects.

The story of the Surge is more complicated than generally portrayed. There is no easy answer to what led to significantly reduced violence. The success of the Surge in quelling violence, particularly in Yusufiyah, relies on a complicated unification of actions at all levels. It required the ground work of the tactical unit, establishing outposts, partnering with indigenous forces, securing areas, acting within the rule of law and working to build local governance capacity. It required a brigade commander and division commander that enabled these actions through asset allocation and other actions. It took a corps commander to orchestrate actions and position forces properly. It required a theater commander willing to fight for forces and accept risk. Beyond the theater, it took an American public to endure yet another year and an American president willing to risk his legacy.

Anyone looking to the Iraq Surge as a model would be mistaken. COIN more than conventional war must be understood in its time and space. If the current soldiers of 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry at Fort Drum, NY, were to deploy to Yusufiyah today to fight against the Islamic State, copying TF 4-31 IN's methods from 2006-2007 would not produce the same results. There are certain principles one can draw that are true for most

successful COIN tactical operations, namely population security, rule of law, training of indigenous forces, and localized solutions. Interestingly, one would likely not find the nebulous “hearts and minds” approach as a useful template. One could learn about leading change in combat from Petraeus and how to effectively lead at the operational level from Odierno. However, one would be remiss to believe the lessons of Iraq are to stand up a Sons of Iraq movement, to flood an area with troops, or even to seek out high risk, high reward solutions anywhere an insurgency blossoms.

Because COIN is so localized, there are limits to doctrine. I have heard many peers claim that FM 3-24 was a great manual for how to do COIN in Iraq. Certainly the impetus for the manual was Iraq. However, neither Petraeus nor Odierno held up the manual and told people to follow it. Both studied the problem, assuredly referencing the manual, and developed a solution for the situation they faced. There is value in having a reference manual for COIN but military leaders must understand that true solutions in these environments require understanding and design not a battle drill.

This study leaves open many questions for others to research. This study solely focused on TF 4-31 IN, drawing conclusions about the Surge from a limited sample. Thus, the conclusions of this thesis remain limited until presented in a broader range. There needs to be a study of how Petraeus and Odierno affected tactical units across Iraq. This is beyond the scope of a master’s thesis but could become a valuable piece of literature for the future.

One of the most important questions is why Petraeus was successful in bringing security to Iraq but long-term stability did not follow? There are many obvious answers, but as this study has shown, the obvious answer is not necessarily the right one. Could

Petraeus have done something to bring political reconciliation? Did the decisions of L. Paul Bremer and the Coalition Provisional Authority, the US led governing body following the invasion of 2003, lay the seeds of political unrest too deeply? Did de-Baathification set Iraq on the wrong course? It is my assertion that there are limits to what the military, even when led by a Princeton PhD, can accomplish.

Another is how did Petraeus' leadership differ from his time in Iraq to his time at the head of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan? Similarly, when Odierno returned to Iraq to replace Petraeus did his method mirror Petraeus' or were they more in line with how he commanded MNC-I? Additionally, what, if anything, did Odierno change from Petraeus' approach?

A thorough study of COIN prior to Petraeus is necessary. So long as the assumption exists that COIN tactics were largely responsible for the decrease in violence, the larger operational, theater-strategic and strategic lessons will remain unanswered. This study has demonstrated that at least three BCTs in the Casey era employed COIN tactics. Emma Sky, who served as the governance director for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Kirkuk beginning in April 2003 remarks on the sheer amount of governance initiatives the 173rd Airborne BCT took on in that time frame.¹⁸² While there are plenty of stories of heavy-handed tactics in Iraq prior to Petraeus' arrival, there were many units conducting themselves in a manner appropriate to Petraeus' vision. It appears that it was not a lack of doctrine but a lack of unity of effort that harmed the situation in Iraq, as well as an overreliance on Shia ISF. These points need more research to confirm or refute.

¹⁸² Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York, Public Affairs, 2015), 43.

The course of OIF after May 2003, in general, requires serious scholarly study from both an historical and a social sciences aspect. There has yet to be a true historical study of the Iraq Surge. While three historians have written books, two were written concurrent with the action and the other, though well researched, deals largely only with one aspect. Any history written in the near-term will be subject to change since archival material is lacking. However, until historians tackle this subject, journalists will dominate the field. It is also important that social scientists study Iraq as well. They take a different approach to research and it is important to have both perspectives. Military officers and civilian leaders seeking to understand Iraq and its implications for future war need these accounts that are not clouded in the biases of journalists.

Quoting an unnamed battalion commander, Kershaw told reporters in August 2007 that “there’s a lot of history to be written yet.”¹⁸³ This is true both for his brigade and the Surge as a whole. This study has been limited to currently available sources. Many primary source documents remain classified and until they are declassified research must remain incomplete. It is likely that we will never understand the Surge in the same way we understand past wars. While information systems collect data in a way never before seen, many assume that fewer and fewer people are saving personal communications.¹⁸⁴ Researchers of past wars have personal letters and diaries to use.

¹⁸³ Chris McCann, “2nd BCT commander updates local communities,” 9 August 2007, *The Mountaineer*, accessed 9 May 2016, www.drum.army.mil/mountaineer.

¹⁸⁴ The author has developed this opinion after speaking to archivists at the National Archives and Records Administration in Kansas City, Missouri, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, and National World War I Museum as well as the curator and archival director of the US Cavalry Museum. Additionally, this was discussed

Soldiers now send messages through e-mail and social media and journaling does not seem to be as much a part of life as it was in previous times. It is possible historians will know the technical aspects of this war like no other but never truly understand the human aspects. Units should develop measures to preserve communications, with soldier consent, for posterity.

While the existing classification of many important documents presents clear challenges to researching the Surge, it remains an important endeavor. Military leaders often use history to inform their views of the present and future, especially in the absence of conflict.¹⁸⁵ OIF stands as one of the US military's most recent experiences in the Middle East and in COIN. It is natural that military leaders from the tactical to the strategic level will want to study this period. However, despite a wealth of books about Iraq, very few have striven to truly analyze this period from a military standpoint. There are many sources available to understand the US national political aspects of OIF but as one goes further down the levels, study becomes more difficult. Many books that focus on the tactical aspect of the Surge serve as good stories more than good studies. The single book written about TF 4-31 IN's experience in Yusufiyah by an outsider, Charles Sasser's *None Left Behind*, is relatively devoid of analysis.

Even good works on the tactical, operational or theater-strategic levels in Iraq often do not analyze how the other levels fit into the picture. For a military leader at the

as part of a Command and General Staff Officer Course Art of War Scholars seminar on the State of the Army History Program.

¹⁸⁵ Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 13.

tactical level, a study of TF 4-31 IN's operations may provide a good reference for how a battalion might approach COIN. However, if that same leader never looked at the broader context he may believe that tactical actions alone can lead to success. Similarly, a theater-level commander researching Petraeus without looking at Odierno or down to the tactical level will have an incomplete picture of how the MNF-I commander's actions contributed to security. If one were to read Linda Robinson's *Tell Me How This Ends* and Fred Kaplan's *The Insurgents*, it would not be a stretch to draw the conclusion that Petraeus and his staff are solely responsible for the turn around in Iraq's security. While Robinson does detail certain tactical units she does not connect them through the levels of war and trace the synergy of the commands. However, if one were to read Petraeus' views on the Surge, they would get a sense of the complexities. Still, Petraeus' primary writing, the forward to Peter Mansoor's book *Surge* later published as a *Foreign Policy* article titled *How We Won in Iraq*, focuses on the larger, broad concepts. It is not enough to only study the theater level. This study provides a detailed look through the levels of war and will help military leaders understand how the levels work together to achieve results.

In his well-regarded essay *The Use and Abuse of Military History*, Historian Sir Michael Howard suggested that military leaders should study history in width, depth and context. It is important to do so for OIF so that leaders can draw meaningful conclusions that they may be able to apply in future conflicts. While each conflict is shaped by its place in time and space, past conflicts can provide inspiration for solutions to new problems. TF 4-31 IN's tour of duty from August 2006 to November 2007 and the impacts that the theater, operational and tactical commanders had on its area of operations provides a very good example of the interrelation of the three levels of war in

a COIN environment. This study will help military leaders achieve depth in their understanding of the Surge as they seek to draw important conclusions. Without a true appreciation for the nature of the Surge and the interrelation of the tactical, operational and theater-strategic levels of war, any study of this era is incomplete and its value will be severely limited. Limited study of this conflict may lead military leaders to draw incorrect conclusions about the Surge as they seek to apply their understanding to future conflict.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Book Chapters

- Alexander, Bevin. *How Wars Are Won: The 13 Rules of War from Ancient Greece to the War on Terror*. New York, Crown Publishers, 2002.
- Andradé, Dale. *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008*. Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010.
- Barnett, Correlli. *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War*. London: Cassell and Co., 1963.
- Bryan, Jeff. *Memoirs from Babylon: A Combat Chaplain's Life in Iraq's Triangle of Death*. La Vergne, TN: Combat Chaplain Ministries, 2011.
- Casey Jr., George W. *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004-February 2007*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2012.
- Cloud, David, and Greg Jaffe. *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*. New York: Brown Publishers, 2009.
- Doyle, William. *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq*. New York: New American Library, 2011.
- Frederick, Jim. *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death*. New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2010.
- Galula, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006.
- Kagan, Kimberley. *The Surge: A Military History*. New York: Encounter Books, 2009.
- Kaplan, Fred. *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013.
- Kilcullen, David. *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Livermore, Doug. "Economy of Force." In *The Strong Grey Line: War-Time Reflections from the West Point Class of 2004*, edited by Cory Wallace, 187-197. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Lynch, Rick. *Adapt or Die: Leadership Principles from an American General*. Grand Rapids: Maker Books, 2013.

- Malkasian, Carter. "Counterinsurgency in Iraq." In *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, edited by Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, 241-259. New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008.
- Mansoor, Peter. *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Murray, Williamson, and Robert H. Scales, Jr. *The Iraq War: A Military History*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003.
- Petraeus, David. Foreword to *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, edited by Peter Mansoor, ix-xxiv. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Ricks, Thomas. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2006.
- . *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.
- Robinson, Linda. *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*. New York: Public Affairs, 2008.
- Sasser, Charles. *None Left Behind: The 10th Mountain Division and the Triangle of Death*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009.
- Sharp, Philip. *Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire. No city provided. Philip Sharp Publisher, 2012*. Self-published, print on demand book.
- Sky, Emma. *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*. New York, Public Affairs, 2015.
- U.S. Department of the Army. Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, December 2006.
- West, Bing. *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq*. New York: Random House, 2008.
- Woodward, Bob. *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

Articles, Papers and Monographs

- Biddle, Stephen, Jeffrey A. Friedman and Jacob N. Shapiro. "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 7-40.

- Howard, Michael. "The Use and Abuse of Military History." *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 9-14.
- Kagan, Frederick W. "Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq." Accessed 8 May 2016. www.aei.org.
- Lawrence, T. E. "Twenty-Seven Articles." *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917. Accessed 31 March 2015. http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_27_Articles_of_T.E._Lawrence.
- Metz, Stephen. "Decision-Making in Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Strategic Shift of 2007." Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 20 May 2010.
- Nagl, John, and Adam Scher. "How to smooth the transition in Iraq." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 October 2008. Accessed 10 April 2016. <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2008/1006/p09s02-coop.html>.

Documents

- Kershaw, Mike. "Commander's Comments 3." *The Sandstorm* 1, no. 3: 3. (Author's collection.)
- Odierno, Raymond. "Counterinsurgency Guidance." Accessed 20 February 2016. <http://council.smallwarsjournal.com>.
- Odierno, Ray. "MNC-I Inbrief GEN Petraeus." February 8, 2007. In Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, 343-368, New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.
- Petraeus, David. "Letter to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians of Multi-National Forces-Iraq." 10 February 2007. Accessed 5 June 2016. <http://www.hughhewitt.com/general-petraeus-opening-letter-to-the-coalition-forces/>.
- "Transitioning Bridging Strategy: Concept and Background Slides (Dec 06)" Briefing Slides. In Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, 337-341, New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.

Unit Histories

- Fort Drum website. "History of the US Army's 31st Infantry Regiment." Accessed 31 October 2015. <http://www.drum.army.mil/2ndBCT/Pages/4-31PolarBearHistory.aspx>.

Watters, David T. "Marine Forces Reserve Operational History: Global War on Terror (2004-2007)." US Marine Forces Reserve Website. Accessed 15 October 2015. www.marforces.marines.mil

Briefings, Speeches and Interviews

Bush, George W. "President's Address to the Nation." Office of the Press Secretary, 10 January 2007. Accessed 20 February 2016. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>.

Caldwell, William. "Caldwell Iraq Brief." Press briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, 26 October 2006. Accessed 20 October 2015. www.aparchive.com.

Petraeus, David. "An Interview with David H. Petraeus, General (US Army, Retired)." *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2015-16): 75-79.

Vitale, Christopher. "Interview with MAJ Chris Vitale." Interview by US Army Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS. October 4, 2012. Accessed 10 November 2015. <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/2796/rec/4>.